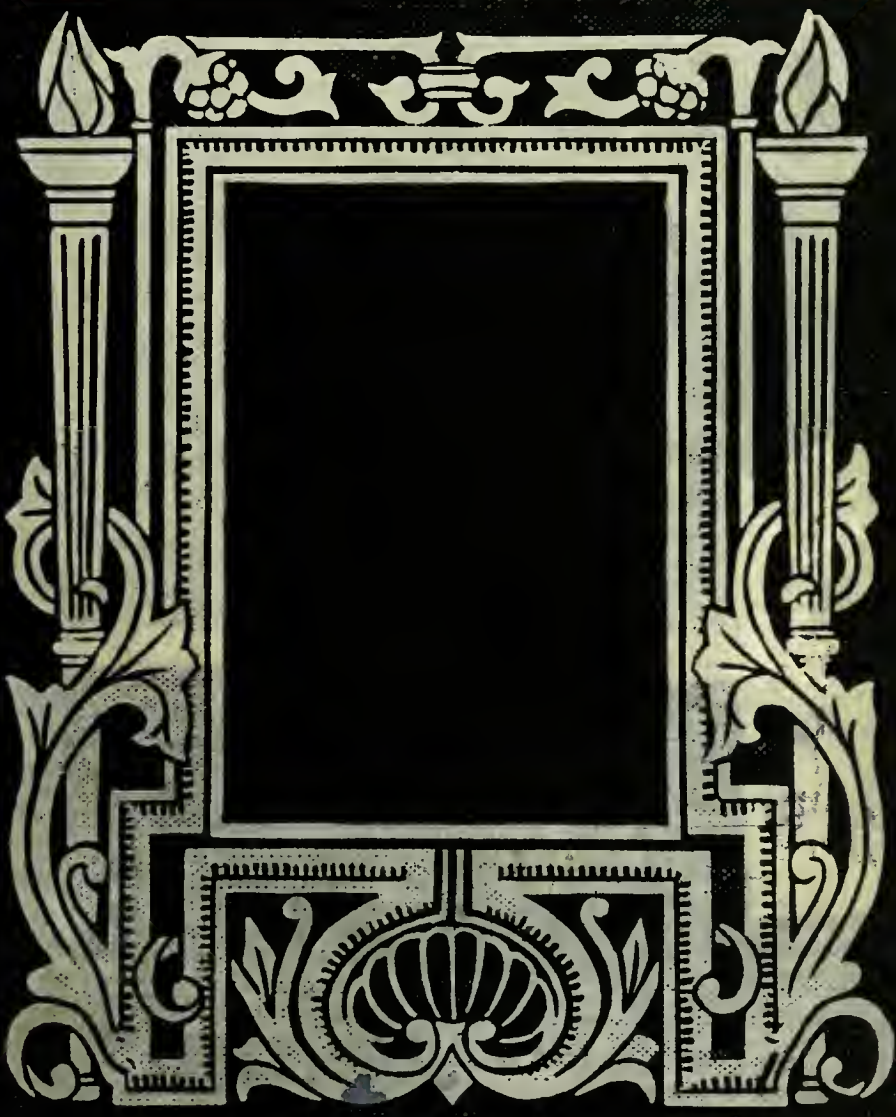
WESTERFELT



A Story of Modern American Life

LIBRARY
WEST VIRGINIA
UNIVERSITY

West Virginia University Libraries
PS 1787.W4 1901 aprm
Westerfelt;
3 0802 000782254 9

West Virginia University Library

This book is due on the date indicated below.

5-31-2010

"WESTERFELT" IS THE SIXTH OF TWELVE AMERICAN NOVELS TO BE PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS DURING 1901, WRITTEN FOR THE MOST PART BY NEW AMERICAN WRITERS, AND DEALING WITH DIFFERENT PHASES OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LIFE.

ALREADY PUBLISHED

"EASTOVER COURT HOUSE." By HENRY BURNHAM BOONE and KENNETH BROWN.

"THE SENTIMENTALISTS." By ARTHUR STANWOOD PIER.

"MARTIN BROOK." By MORGAN BATES.

"A VICTIM OF CIRCUMSTANCES." By GERALDINE ANTHONY.

"DAYS LIKE THESE." By EDWARD W. TOWNSEND.

WESTERFELT

A Novel

By

Will N. Harben

New York and London
Harper & Brothers Publishers
1901

APPAL. RM.

PS1787
.W4
1901

Library
West Virginia University

Copyright, 1901, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

TO

MY WIFE

382519

Westerfelt

Chapter I

THEY had had a quilting at the house of the two sisters that day. Six or seven women of the neighborhood, of middle age or older, had been in to sew on the glaring, varicolored square. All day long they had thrust their needles up and down and gossiped in their slow, insinuating way, pausing only at noon to move their chairs to the dinner-table, where they sat with the same set curves to their backs.

The sun had gone down behind the mountain and the workers had departed, some traversing the fields and others disappearing by invisible paths in the near-by wood. The two sisters had taken the finished quilt from its wooden frame, and were carefully ironing out the wrinkles preparatory to adding it to the useless stack of its kind in the corner of the room.

"I believe, as I'm alive, that it's the purtiest

as well fixed as Westerfelt is ort to be allowed to look around a little, as folks say in town when they are a-tradin'. Lord, sometimes I lie awake at night thinkin' what a good time I mought 'a' had an' what I mought 'a' run across ef I hadn't been in sech a blamed fool hurry! Lawsy me, I seed a deef an' dumb woman in town t'other day, and, for a wonder, she wasn't married, nur never had been! I jest looked at that woman an' my mouth fairly watered."

"Yo're a born fool," snorted Mrs. Slogan. "What's that got to do with John Wester—"

"Sh—" broke in Mrs. Dawson. "I heer Sally a-comin'."

"But I *want* 'er to heer me," cried the woman appealed to, just as the subject of the conversation entered the room from the passage which connected the two parts of the house. "It'll do 'er good, I hope, to know folks think she has made sech a goose of 'erse'f."

"What have I done now, Aunt Clarissa?" sighed the frail-looking girl, as she took off her sun-bonnet and stood in the centre of the room, holding a bunch of wild flowers and delicate maiden-hair fern leaves in her hand.

"Why, John Westerfelt has done you exactly as he has many a other gal," was the

bolt the woman hurled. "He's settin' up to Lizzie Lithicum like a house afire. I don't know but I'm glad of it, too, fer I've told you time an' time agin that he didn't care a hill o' beans fer no gal, but was out o' sight out o' mind with one as soon as another un struck his fancy."

Sally became deathly pale as she turned to the bed in one of the corners of the room and laid her flowers down. She was silent for several minutes. All the others were watching her. Even her mother seemed to have resigned her to the rude method of awakening which suited her sister's heartless mood. At first it looked as if Sally were going to ignore the thrust, but they soon discovered their mistake, for she suddenly turned upon them with a look on her rigid face they had never seen there before. It was as if youth had gone from it, leaving only its ashes.

"I don't believe one word of it," she said, firmly. "I don't believe it. I wouldn't believe it was anything but your mean meddling if you swore it."

"Did you ever!" gasped Mrs. Slogan; "after all the advice I've give the foolish girl!"

"Well, I reckon that's beca'se you don't want to believe it, Sally," said Slogan, with-

out any intention of abetting his wife. "I don't want to take sides in yore disputes, but Westerfelt certainly is settin' square up to Ab's daughter. I seed 'em takin' a ride in his new hug-me-tight buggy yesterday. She's been off to Cartersville, you know, an' has come back with dead loads o' finery. They say she's l'arned to play 'Dixie' on a pyanner an' reads a new novel every week. Ab's awfully tickled about it. Down at the store t'other day, when Westerfelt rid by on his prancin' hoss, Clem Dill said: 'Ab, I reckon it won't be long 'fore you move over on yore son-in-law's big farm,' an' Ab laughed so hard he let the tobacco juice run down on his shirt.

"'Liz 'll manage his case,' sez he. 'Westerfelt may fly around the whole caboodle of 'em, but when Liz gits 'er head set she cuts a wide swathe an' never strikes a snag ur stump, an' cleans out the fence-corners as smooth as a parlor floor.'"

Sally bent down over her uncle; her face was slowly hardening into conviction. When she spoke her voice had lost its ring of defiance and got its strength of utterance only from sheer despair.

"You saw them in his new buggy, Uncle

Peter," she asked, "taking a ride—are you sure?"

Peter Slogan dropped his eyes; he seemed to realize the force of the blow he had helped to deal, and made no answer.

Mrs. Slogan laughed out triumphantly as she stooped to put her smoothing-iron down on the hearth.

"Ride together!" she exclaimed. "As ef that was all! Why, he's been goin' thar twice an' three times a week regular. Jest as he begun taperin' off with you he tapered on with her. I don't reckon you hardly remember when he come heer last, do you? Ab Lithicum's as big a fool as yore mother was in not callin' a halt. Jest let a man have a little property, an' be a peg or two higher as to family connections, an' he kin ride dry-shod over a whole community. He's goin' thar to-night. Mis' Simpkins was at Lithicum's when a nigger fetched the note. Lizzie was axin' 'er what to put on. She's got a sight o' duds. They say it's jest old dresses that her cousins in town got tired o' wearin', but they are ahead o' anything in the finery line out heer."

A look of wretched conviction stamped itself on the girl's delicate features. Slowly she turned to pick up her flowers, and went

with them to the mantel-piece. There was an empty vase half filled with water, and into it she tried to place the stems, but they seemed hard to manage in her quivering fingers, and she finally took the flowers to her own room across the passage. They heard the sagging door scrape the floor as she closed it after her.

"Now, I reckon you two are satisfied," said Mrs. Dawson, bitterly. "Narry one of you hain't one bit o' feelin' ur pity."

Mrs. Slogan shrugged her shoulders, and Peter looked up regretfully, and then with downcast eyes continued to pull silently at his pipe.

"I jest did what I ort to 'a' done," said Mrs. Slogan. "She ort to know the truth, an' I tol' 'er."

"You could 'a' gone about it in a more human way," sighed Mrs. Dawson. "The Lord knows the child's had enough to worry 'er, anyway. She's been troubled fer the last week about him not comin' like he used to, an' she'd a-knowed the truth soon enough."

An hour later supper was served, and though her aunt called to her that it was on the table, Sally Dawson did not appear, so the meal passed in unusual silence. The Slogans

ate with their habitual zest, but the little bent widow only munched a piece of bread and daintily sipped her cup of buttermilk.

Presently they heard the rasping sound of Sally's door as it was drawn open, and then they saw her go through the passage and step down into the yard. Rising quickly, Mrs. Dawson went to the door and looked out. She descried her daughter making her way hastily towards the gate.

"Sally!" cried out the old woman, her thin voice cracking on its too high key, "Sally, wait thar fer me! Stop, I say!"

The girl turned and waited for her mother to approach through the half-darkness, her face averted towards the road.

"Sally, whar have you started?"

The girl did not move as she answered:

"Nowhere, mother; I—"

The old woman put out her bony hand and laid it on the girl's arm. "Sally, you are not a-tellin' me the truth. You are a-goin' to try to see John Westerfelt."

"Well, what if I am, mother?"

"I don't believe I'd go, darlin'. I'd be above lettin' any triflin' man know I was that bad off—I railly would try to have a little more pride."

Sally Dawson turned her head, and her eyes bore down desperately on the small face before her.

"Mother," she said, "you don't know *what* you'd do if you was in my place."

"I reckon not, darlin', but—"

"Mother, I'll die if I don't know the truth. Once he told me if I ever heard one word against him to come to him with it, and I said I would. Maybe Aunt Clarissa is right about Lizzie an' him, but I've got to get it straight from him. He went to town to-day, and always drives along the road about this time."

"Then I'll go out thar with you, Sally, if you will do sech a thing."

"No, you won't, mother. Nobody has any right to hear what I've got to say to him."

The old woman raised the corner of her gingham apron to her eyes as if some inward emotion had prompted tears, but the fountains of grief were dry.

"Oh, Sally," she whimpered, "I'm so miserable! I'll never forgive yore aunt fer devilin' you so much, right now when you are troubled. I'll tell you what me 'n' you'll do; we'll git us a house an' move away from 'er."

"I don't care what she says—if it's *true*," replied Sally. "If — if John Westerfelt has

fooled me, I wouldn't care if it was printed in every paper in the State. If he don't love me, I won't care for nothin'. Mother, you know he made me think he loved—wanted me, at least—that was all I could make out of it."

"I was a leetle afeerd all along," admitted Mrs. Dawson. "I was afeerd, though I couldn't let on at the time. Folks said he was powerful changeable. You see, he has treated other gals the same way. Sally, you must be brave, an' not let on. Why, thar was Mattie Logan—jest look at her. Folks said she was a rantin' fool about 'im, but when he quit goin' thar she tuck up with Clem Dill, an' now she's a happy wife an' mother."

Sally turned towards the gate. "What's that to me?" she said, fiercely. "I'm not her, and she's not me. Stay here, mother. I'll be back soon."

"Well, I'm goin' to set right thar on that log outside the gate, an' not budge one inch till you come back, Sally. If you wait too long, though, I'll come after you. Oh, Sally, I'm awful afeerd—I don't know what at, but I'm afeerd."

Together the two passed through the gate,

and then, leaving her mother at the log, Sally hastened through the darkness towards the main road, several hundred yards away. Mrs. Dawson sat down and folded her hands tightly in her lap and waited. After a few minutes she heard the beat of a horse's hoofs on the clay road, and when it ceased she knew her child was demanding and learning her fate. Fifteen minutes passed. The beat of hoofs was resumed, and soon afterwards Sally Dawson came slowly through the darkness, her dress dragging over the dewy grass. She seemed to have forgotten that her mother was waiting for her, and was about to pass on to the house, when Mrs. Dawson spoke up.

"Heer I am, Sally; what did he say?"

The girl sat down on the log beside her mother. There was a desperate glare in her eyes that had never been in eyes more youthful. Her lips were drawn tight, her small hands clinched.

"It's every bit true," she said, under her breath. "He's goin' with Lizzie, regular. He admitted he had an engagement with her tonight. Mother, it's all up with me. He's jest tired of me. I don't deserve any pity for bein' such a fool, but it's awful—awful—awful!"

Mrs. Dawson caught her breath suddenly, so sharp was her own pain, but she still strove to console her daughter.

"He's railly not wuth thinkin' about, darlin'; do—do try to forget 'im. It may look like a body never could git over a thing like that, but I reckon a pusson kin manage to sort o' bear it better, after awhile, than they kin right at the start. Sally, I'm goin' to tell you a secret. I'd 'a' told you before this but I 'lowed you was too young to heer the like. It's about me 'n' yore pa—some'n' you never dreamt could 'a' happened. Mebby it 'll give you courage, fer if a old woman like me kin put up with sech humiliation, shorely a young one kin. Sally, do you remember, when you was a leetle, tiny girl, that thar was a Mis' Talley, a tall, slim, yaller-headed woman, who come out from town to board one summer over at Hill's? Well, she never had nothin' much to occupy 'er mind with durin' the day, an' she used to take 'er fancy-work an' set in the shady holler at the gum spring, whar yore pa went to water his hoss. Of course, she never keerd a cent fer him, but I reckon to pass the time away she got to makin' eyes at him. Anyway, it driv' 'im plumb crazy. I never knowed about it

till the summer was mighty nigh over, an' I wouldn't 'a' diskivered it then if I hadn't 'a' noticed that he had made powerful little headway ploughin' in the field whar he claimed to be at work. She wasn't a bad woman. I give 'er credit fer that, an' I reckon she never talked to 'im many times, an' never thought of him except to laugh at him after she went back home, but he never quit thinkin' about *her*. She had 'er picture printed in a paper along with some other church-women in town, an' somehow he got a-hold of it an' cut it out. He used to keep it hid in a ol' Testament, in a holler tree behind the cow-lot, an' used to slip out an' look at it when he 'lowed he wasn't watched. Sally, I never once mentioned it to him. I seed what had been done couldn't be undone, but the Lord on High knows well enough how I suffered. Sally, maybe it's the Lord's will fer you to lose this feller now when you are young an' able to fight agin it, so you won't suffer the awful humiliation at a time o' life when a body ort to be easy. Sally, are you a-listenin' to me?"

"Yes, mother. I heard every word you said about pa an' the woman. I heard that, and I heard them frogs down there croaking, too, and the chickens fluttering on their roosts.

I heard his horse still a-trotting. Mother, he was whistling when he drove up just now—*whistling!*"

The two stared into each other's eyes for a moment, then the old woman went on:

"It'll go powerful hard with you now, but you'd better have it over with when you're young 'an to suffer when you're a weak old woman like me. Ol' age cayn't stand such things so well. No, I never once mentioned the woman to yore pa. I knowed it would jest make him resort to lyin', an' at the bottom he was a good, pious man. He jest couldn't quit thinkin' o' that yaller-headed woman an' her blue eyes an' shiny store shoes. I jest pitied 'im like he was a baby. It went on till he got sick, an' many an' many a day he'd lie thar helpless an' look out towards the cow-lot, wistful like, an' I knowed he was thinkin' o' that pictur'. He was lookin' that way when he drawed his last breath. It may 'a' been jest a notion o' mine, fer some said he was unconscious all that day, but it looked that away to me. I nussed him through his sickness as well as I could, an' attended to every wish he had till he passed away. Now, you know some'n' else, Sally. You know why I never put up no rock at his grave. The

neighbors has had a lots to say about that one thing—most of 'em sayin' I was too stingy to pay fer it, but it wasn't that, darlin'. It was jest beca'se I had too much woman pride. When I promised the Lord to love an' obey, it was not expected that I'd put up a rock over another woman's man if he was dead. Sally, you are a sight more fortunate than you think you are."

Sally rose, the steely look was still in her eyes, her face was like finely polished granite. Mrs. Dawson got up anxiously, and together they passed through the gate. They could see the red fire of Peter Slogan's pipe, and the vague form of his wife standing over him.

"Now, darlin'—" began Mrs. Dawson, but Sally checked her.

"Don't talk to me any more, mother," she said, impatiently. "I want to be quiet and think—oh, my God, have mercy on me!"

Mrs. Dawson said nothing more, and with a sinking heart she saw the stricken child of her breast walk on into her room and close the door.

"Whar's she been?" asked Mrs. Slogan, aggressively.

"She went to git out o' re'ch o' yore tongue," said the widow, desperately.

To this apt retort Mrs. Slogan could not reply, but it evoked an amused laugh from her appreciative husband.

"Well, Sally didn't shorely try to do that afoot, did she?" he gurgled. "Looks like she'd 'a' tuck a train ef sech was her intention."

Mrs. Dawson passed into the house and through the dining-room into her own small apartment and closed the door. She lighted a tallow-dip and placed it on the old-fashioned bureau, from which the mahogany veneering had been peeling for years. Her coarse shoes rang harshly on the smooth, bare floor. She sank into a stiff, hand-made chair and sat staring into vacancy. The bend of her back had never been more pronounced.

"The idee," she muttered, "o' my goin' over my trouble as ef that amounted to a hill o' beans ur would be a bit o' comfort! My God, ef some'n' ain't done to relieve Sally I'll go stark crazy, an'—an'—I could kill 'im in cold blood, freely, so I could. Oh, my pore, helpless baby! it seems like she never did have any rail friend but me."

She rose and crept to the window, parted the calico curtains, and peered across the passage at her daughter's door. There was a

narrow pencil of light beneath it. "She's readin' his letters over," said the old woman, "ur mebby she's prayin'. That's railly what I ort to be a-doin' instead o' standin' heer tryin' to work out what's impossible fer any mortal. I reckon ef a body jest would have enough faith—but I did have faith till—till it quit doin' me a particle o' good. Yes, I ort to be a-prayin', and I'll do it—funny I never thought o' that sooner. Ef God fetched a rain, like they claim he did t'other day, shorely he'll do a little some'n' in a case like this un."

She blew out the tallow-dip and knelt down in the darkness, and interlaced her bony fingers.

"Lord God Almighty, King of Hosts—my Blessed Redeemer," she began, "you know how I have suffered an' why I never could put no grave-rock over my husband's remains; you know how I have writhed an' twisted under that scourge, but I kin bear that now, an' more an' more of it, but I jest cayn't have my pore little baby go through the same, an' wuss. It don't look like it's fair — no way a body kin look at it, for shorely one affliction of that sort in a family is enough, in all reason. I stood mine, bein' a ol' woman, but Sally, she'll jest pine away an' die, fer

she had all her heart set on that one man. Oh, God Almighty, my Redeemer, you that forgive the dyin' thief an' begged fer help in yore own agony, let this cup pass. Huh! I'd ruther have 'em stick a speer through my side time an' time agin 'an have it go on with Sally like it is. You'd better do what I ask, fer it's makin' a reg'lar devil out o' me. I feel it comin' on, an' I won't be fit fer no place but hell fire. I jest cayn't see no sense, jestice, nur reason in my pore little child lyin' in her bed an' twistin' with sech trouble. You, or some power above or below, tuck Jasper frum me an' left that yaller-haired sting fer me to brood over day an' night, but the same ur wuss mustn't come to Sally, kase she don't deserve it—she's *helpless!* Oh, Lord, have mercy—have mercy—mercy—mercy!"

She rose to her feet, and without undressing threw herself on the bed. She could hear Slogan and his wife, now barefooted, thumping about in the next room. Far away against the mountain-side she heard a hunter calling to his dogs and blowing a horn.

Chapter II

JOHN WESTERFELT lived on his own farm in the big two-storied frame house which had been built by his grandfather, and which came to him at the death of his father and mother. The place was managed for him by a maternal uncle, whose wife and daughter kept the house in order. But all three of them had gone away on a short visit, leaving only the old negro woman, who was the cook and servant about the house, to attend to his wants.

The morning following his meeting with Sally Dawson on the road near her house, Westerfelt arose with a general feeling of dissatisfaction with himself. He had not slept well. Several times through the night he awoke from unpleasant dreams, in which he always saw Sally Dawson's eyes raised to his through the darkness, and heard her spiritless voice as she bade him good-bye, and with bowed head moved away, after promising to return his letters the next day.

Westerfelt

He was a handsome specimen of physical manhood. His face was dark and of the poetic, sensitive type; his eyes were brown, his hair was almost black, and thick, and long enough to touch his collar. His shoulders were broad, and his limbs muscular and well shaped. He wore tight-fitting top-boots, which he had drawn over his trousers to the knee. His face was clean-shaven, and but for his tanned skin and general air of the better-class planter, he might have passed for an actor, poet, or artist. He was just the type of Southerner who, with a little more ambition, and close application to books, might have become a leading lawyer and risen finally to a seat in Congress. But John Westerfelt had never been made to see the necessity of exertion on his part. Things had come easily ever since he could remember, and his wants were simple, and, in his own way, he enjoyed life, suffering sharply at times, as he did this morning, over his mistakes, for at heart he was not bad.

"Poor little girl," he said, as he went out on the front veranda to wait for his breakfast. "It was just blind thoughtlessness. I really never dreamt she was feeling that way. I've just got to make it lighter for her. To begin

with, I'll never put my foot inside of Lithicum's gate, and I'll go over there this morning and try to make her see what a worthless scamp I really am. I wonder if I couldn't marry her—but, no, that wouldn't be right to her nor to me, for a man hasn't the moral right to marry a woman he doesn't really love, even if she thinks he is the only man on earth. I wonder if I really told her I loved her?" Here Westerfelt shuddered, and felt a flush of shame steal over his face. "Yes, I have—I have," he muttered, "and I reckon I really did fancy I cared for her at the time. Yes, I have been a contemptible coward; for my own idle enjoyment I have allowed her to go on counting on me until the thought of my going to see Lizzie Lithicum nearly kills her. Well, by George! I can cut that off, and I shall, too."

Just then, in looking across the meadow lying between his house and the main road, he saw the short form of Peter Slogan approaching.

"He's coming here," thought Westerfelt. "She has asked him to bring the letters, even before breakfast. That's the little woman's way of showing her pride. What a contemptible scoundrel I am!"

But as he continued to watch the approach-

ing figure he was surprised to note that Slogan was displaying more energy than usual. The little, short man was taking long steps, and now and then jumping over an obstacle instead of going around it. And when he had reached the gate he leaned on it and stared straight at Westerfelt, as if he had lost his power of speech. Then it was that Westerfelt remarked that Slogan's face looked troubled, and that a general air of agitation rested on him.

"I wish you'd step out, if you please, John," he said, after a moment. "I've been walkin' so blamed fast I've mighty nigh lost my breath. I'm blowin' like a stump-suckin' hoss."

Westerfelt went to him.

"What is the matter, Slogan?" he questioned, in a tone of concern.

"We've had big trouble over our way," panted Slogan. "Sally fell off'n the foot-log into the creek this mornin' an' was drowned."

"Drowned! You don't mean that, Slogan!" cried Westerfelt, in horror; "surely there is some mistake!"

"No; she's as dead as a mackerel," Slogan answered. "She wasn't diskivered tell she'd been under water fer a good half-hour. She

started, as usual, about daybreak, over to her cousin, Molly Dugan's, fer a bucket o' fresh milk, an' we never missed 'er until it was time she was back, an' then we went all the way to Dugan's before we found out she hadn't been thar at all. Then her ma tuck up a quar notion, an' helt to it like a leech fer a long time. My hoss had got out o' the stable an' strayed off some'rs in the woods, an' Sally's mother firmly believed the gal had run off. I don't know why she 'lowed Sally would do sech a thing, but she did, and jest paced up an' down the yard yellin' an' takin' on an' beggin' us to go fetch her back, so that none of us at the house thought o' draggin' the hole at the foot-log. But Bill Dugan did, an' soon come with the news whar she was at. Then her ma jest had a spasm. I railly believe on my soul she cussed God an' all futurity. She raved till she was black in the face."

"Then there is — is no doubt about it?" gasped Westerfelt. "She is dead?"

"Of course she's dead," answered Slogan; "an' bein' as my hoss ain't to be had, I 'lowed I'd try to borrow one o' yore'n to go order the coffin." Slogan here displayed a piece of twine which he had wound into a coil. "I've got the exact length o' the body. I 'lowed

that would be the best way. I reckon they kin tell me at the store how much play a corpse ort to have at each end. I've noticed that coffins always look longer, a sight, than the pusson ever did that was to occupy 'em, but I thought ef I tuck the exact measure—"

"Here's the stable key," interrupted Westerfelt, with a shudder. "Take any horse you want. You'll find saddles and bridles in the shed."

Slogan turned away, and Westerfelt walked back to the veranda. "My God!" he groaned; "why don't I *know* it was accident? If it was not, then may the Lord have mercy on my soul!"

He went into his room and threw himself on his bed and stared fixedly at the ceiling, a thousand conflicting thoughts crowding upon him. Presently he heard Slogan talking to the horse in the yard, and went out just as he was mounting.

"I wisht you'd hand me a switch, John," he said. "I don't want to be all day goin' an' comin'. I'll be blamed ef I ain't afeerd them two ol' cats 'll be a-fightin' an' scratchin' 'fore I get back. They had a time of it while the gal was alive, an' I reckon thar 'll be no peace at all now."

"Does Mrs. Dawson blame anybody—or—or—?" Westerfelt paused as if he hardly knew how to finish.

"Oh, I reckon the ol' woman *does* feel a leetle hard at us—my wife in particular, an'—an' some o' the rest, I reckon. You see, thar was a lot said at the quiltin' yesterday about Lizzie Lithicum a-cuttin' of Sally out, an' one thing or other, an' a mother's calculated to feel bitter about sech talk, especially when her only child is laid out as cold an' stiff as a poker."

Again Westerfelt shuddered; his face was ghastly; his mouth was drawn and his lips quivered; there was a desperate, appealing, shifting of his eyes.

"I reckon Mrs. Dawson feels hurt at me," he said, tentatively.

Slogan hesitated a moment before speaking. "Well," he said, as if he felt some sort of apology should come from him, "maybe she does—a little, John, but the Lord knows you cayn't expect much else at sech a time, an' when she's under sech a strain."

"Did she mention any names?" questioned the young man, desperately; and while he waited for Slogan to speak a look of inexpressible agony lay in his eyes.

"I never was much of a hand to tote tales," said Slogan, "but I may as well give you a little bit of advice as to how you ort to act with the ol' woman while she is so wrought up. I wouldn't run up agin 'er right now ef I was you. She's tuck a funny sort o' notion that she don't want you at the funeral or the buryin'. She told me three times, as I was startin' off, to tell you not to come to the church nur to the grave. She was clean out o' her senses, an' under ordinary circumstances I'd say not to pay a bit of attention to 'er, but she's so upset she might liter'ly pounce on you like a wild-cat at the meetin'-house."

"Tell her, for me, that I shall respect her wish," said Westerfelt. "I shall not be there, Slogan. If she will let you do so, tell her I am sorry her daughter is—dead."

"All right, John, I'll do what I can to pacify 'er," promised Peter, as he took the switch Westerfelt handed him and started away.

Chapter III

WHEN Slogan had ridden off through the mild spring sunshine, Westerfelt saddled another horse and rode out of the gate towards the road leading away from the house containing Sally Dawson's remains. He hardly had any definite idea of whither he was going. He had only a vague impression that the movement of a horse under him would to some degree assuage the awful pain at his heart, but he was mistaken; the pangs of self-accusation were as sharp as if he were a justly condemned murderer. His way led past the cross-roads store, which contained the post-office. Two men, a woman, and a child stood huddled together at the door. They were talking about the accident; Westerfelt knew that by their attitudes of awed attention and their occasional glances towards Mrs. Dawson's. He was about to pass by when the storekeeper signalled to him and called out:

"Mail fer you, Mr. Westerfelt; want me to fetch it out?"

Westerfelt nodded, and reined, in and waited till the storekeeper came out with a packet. "It must 'a' been drapped in after I closed last night," he said. "Thar wasn't a thing in the box 'fore I went home, an' it was the only one thar when I unlocked this mornin'. Mighty bad news down the creek, ain't it?" he ended. "Powerful hard on the old woman. They say she's mighty nigh distracted."

Making some unintelligible reply, Westerfelt rode on, the packet held tightly in his hand. It was addressed in Sally Dawson's round, girlish handwriting, and he knew it contained his letters, and perhaps—he shuddered at the thought of what else it might contain.

He whipped his horse into a gallop. He wanted to reach a spot where he could open the package unobserved. He met several wagons and a buggy. They contained people who bowed and spoke to him, but he scarcely saw them. At the first path leading from the road into the wood he turned aside, and then opened his package. There were three or four letters and notes he had written the dead girl, and one blotted sheet from her. With a quaking soul he read it. It confirmed him in the fear which had taken hold of him

at the first news of the tragedy. The letter ran:

"DEAR JOHN, — I simply cannot stand it any longer. It is now about three in the morning. Some people contend that such acts are done only by crazy folks, but I don't believe I ever was more sensible than I am right now. I am not ashamed to own that I had my heart and soul set on being your wife and making you happy, but now that I know you didn't feel a bit like I did, an' love Lizzie, I jest can't stand it. The pain is awful—awful. I could not meet folks face to face, now that they know the truth. I'd rather die a hundred deaths than see you an' her even once together. I couldn't live long anyway. I'm simply too weak and sick at heart. The hardest thing of all is to remember that you never did care for me all the time I was making such a little fool of myself. I know you never did. Folks said you was changeable, but I never once believed it till last night on the road. I have fixed it so everybody will think my death was accidental. I've been warned time and again about that foot-log, and nobody will suspicion the truth. You must never mention it to a soul. It is my last and only request. It would go harder with mother if she knew that. Good-bye, John. I love you more right now than I ever did, and I don't know as I blame you much or harbor much resentment. I thought I would not say anything more, but I cannot help it. John, Lizzie is not the woman for you. She never will love you deep, or very long. Good-bye.

"SALLY."

Westerfelt put the letter in his pocket and turned his horse into an unfrequented road leading to the mountain and along its side. The air was filled with the subtle fragrance

of growing and blooming things. He was as near insanity as a man can well be who still retains his mental equipoise. In this slow manner, his horse picking his way over fallen trees and mountain streams, he traversed several miles, and then, in utter desolation, turned homeward.

It was noon when he came in sight of his house. Peter Slogan had returned the horse, and, with a parcel under his arm, was trudging homeward. All that night Westerfelt lay awake, and the next morning he did not leave his room, ordering the wondering servant not to prepare any breakfast for him. He did not want to show himself on the veranda or in the front yard, thinking some neighbor might stop and want to talk over the tragedy. There were moments during this solitary morning that he wished others knew the secret of Sally Dawson's death. It seemed impossible for him to keep the grewsome truth locked in his breast—it made the happening seem more of a crime. And then an awful thought dawned upon him. Was it not a way God had of punishing him, and would there ever be any end to it?

From his window he had a clear view of Mrs. Dawson's house. There was a group

of people in their best clothes on the porch, and considerable activity about the front yard, to the fence of which a goodly number of horses and mules were hitched. The little church, with its gray, weather-beaten spire, could also be seen farther away, on a slight elevation. It had a fence around it, and blended with the whiteness of the fence were a few gravestones.

About eleven o'clock Westerfelt saw a negro boy climb a ladder leaning against the side of the church and creep along the edge of the roof to the open cupola and grasp the clapper of the cast-iron bell. Then it began to toll. The boy was an unpractised hand, and the strokes were irregular, sometimes too slow and sometimes too rapid.

It was a signal for the procession to leave the house. Westerfelt's eyes were glued to the one-horse wagon at the gate, for it contained the coffin, and was moving like a thing alive. Behind it walked six men, swinging their hats in their hands. Next followed Slogan's rickety buggy with its threatening wheels, driven by Peter. The bent figure of the widow in black sat beside him. Other vehicles fell in behind, and men, women, and children on foot, carrying wild flowers, dog-

wood blossoms, pink and white honeysuckle, and bunches of violets, brought up the rear.

Westerfelt was just turning from the window, unable to stand the sight longer, when he saw Abner Lithicum's new road-wagon, with its red wheels and high green bed, in which sat the five women of his family, pause at his gate. Going out on the veranda, Westerfelt saw Abner coming up the walk, cracking his wagon-whip at the stunted rose-bushes.

"Hello!" he cried out; "I 'lowed mebby you hadn't left yet. It 'll be a good half-hour 'fore they all get thar an' settled. The preacher promised me this mornin' he'd wait on me an' my folks. It takes my gals sech a' eternity to fix up when they go anywhar."

"Won't you come in?" asked Westerfelt, coldly, seeing that Lithicum did not seem to be in any hurry to announce the object of his visit.

"Oh no, thanky'," said Lithicum, with a broad grin; "the truth is, I clean forgot my tobacco. I knowed you wasn't a chawin' man, but yore uncle is, an' he mought have left a piece of a plug lyin' round. My old woman tried to git me to use her snuff as a makeshift, but lawsy me! the blamed powdery truck jest washes down my throat like leaves

in a mill-race. I never could see how women kin set an' rub an' rub the'r gums with it like they do. I reckon it's jest a sort o' habit."

"I'm sorry," said Westerfelt, "but I don't know where my uncle keeps his tobacco."

"Well, I reckon I'll strike some chawin' man down at the meetin'-house." Lithicum stood, awkwardly cutting the air with his whip. "Railly, thar is one thing more," he said, haltingly. "Lizzie 'lowed, as thar was a' extra seat in our wagon, you might like to come on with us. She said she had some'n' particular to tell you."

"Tell her I am not going," said Westerfelt, sharply. "I am not going."

"Oh, you ain't!" Lithicum looked his surprise both at the decision and at the unaccountable coldness of the young man's manner, which he had not noticed till now. "Well, so long, Mr. Westerfelt, I reckon you know yore own business, but I 'lowed everybody would turn out, through respect to all concerned, if nothin' else."

"I am not going; it is impossible for me to go," answered Westerfelt, and he turned abruptly into the house.

Alone in his room, Westerfelt took Sally Dawson's last letter from his pocket and read

it again. Then he lighted a match and started to burn it, but some inward fear seemed to check him, and the match burned down to his rigid fingers and went out. "No," he said, "that would be cowardly. I shall keep it always, to remind me of my hellish mistake. Great God! the idea of my going to *her* funeral in a red wagon with Lizzie Lithicum—Lizzie Lithicum!"

The next morning, as he was returning from the post-office, Westerfelt met Peter Slogan riding to a field he had rented down the road, and which he was getting ready for cotton-planting. Slogan was astride of his bony horse, which was already clad in shuck collar and clanking harness, and carried on his shoulder a cumbersome plough-stock.

"Well," he smiled, reining in as he caught Westerfelt's eye, "I 'lowed hard work in the sun would do more to git the kinks out'n me atter all the trouble at my house than anything else."

"How is Mrs. Dawson?" ventured Westerfelt.

"You'd better ax me how she *ain't*," retorted Slogan, shrugging his shoulders. "I could tell you a sight easier. She's turned into a

regular hell-cat. I thought her an' my wife was bad enough 'fore the trouble, but it's wuss now. The ol' woman has left us."

"Left you?" repeated Westerfelt. "What do you mean?"

"Why, she says she won't sleep an' eat in the same house with my wife, beca'se she give Sally advice, an'—an' one thing or nuther. The ol' woman has bought 'er some second-hand cookin' utensils—a oven an' a skillet an' a cup an' a plate or two, an' has moved 'er bed an' cheer into the Hilgard cabin down below us. She slept thar last night. It looks powerful like she's wrong in the upper-story. At fust she was all yells an' fury, but now she jest sulks an' hain't got one word to say to nobody. I went down thar last night an' tried to call 'er to the door, but she wouldn't stir a peg. As soon as she heerd me at the fence she blowed out 'er light an' wouldn't let on no more'n ef I was a dog a-barkin'. Now, I hold that she hain't got no call to treat me that away. I never tuck no hand in 'er disputes with my wife, an' ef hard things has been said about Sally, why they never come from me. Lord, I've got plenty else to think about besides gals an' women. I think I'm on track o' the skunk 'at stole my axe."

Westerfelt walked on. It was plain to him that none of the neighbors knew the secret of Sally Dawson's death, but he was beginning to think that the mother of the girl might half suspect the truth, and that she was his enemy for life he did not doubt.

Chapter IV

THE cornfields had grown to their full height and turned from green to yellow. The stalks, stripped of their tops and blades, were bent by the weight of their ears. There was a whispering of breezes in the sedge-fields, in the long rows of brown-bolled cotton plants, among the fodder-stacks, and in the forest that stretched from the main road up the mountain-side. It was the season in which the rugged landscape appeared most brilliant; when the kalmia bloomed, the gentian, the primrose, the yellow daisy, the woodbine, and the golden-disked aster still lingered in sunny spots. It was the season in which the leaves of the maple were as red as blood.

John Westerfelt was leaving home, to take up his abode in the adjoining county over the mountain. As he sat upon his horse and slowly rode along, one who had known him six months before would scarcely have recognized him, so great had been the change in his appearance. His face was thinner; at the tem-

ples his hair had turned slightly gray, and an ineffable expression of restless discontent lay about his eyes. A sum of money had come to him from his father's estate, and with it he had purchased a livery-stable at the village of Cartwright. Ever since Sally Dawson's death, he had wanted an excuse to get away from the spot where the tragedy had occurred, and his leaving his farm to the management of his uncle now caused no particular comment among his neighbors.

Reaching the highest point of the mountain, the village in question lay in the valley below. Here he paused and looked behind him.

"God being my helper, I'm going to try to begin a new life over here," he said, almost aloud. "Surely, I have repented sorely enough, and this is not shirking my just punishment. A man ought to make something of himself, and I never could, in my frame of mind, with that poor, silent old woman constantly before my eyes, and knowing that she will never forgive my offence, and is perhaps constantly praying for some calamity to strike me down."

At the first house in the outskirts of the village he dismounted. A woman hearing his approach announced by a couple of lean dogs,

which sprang from under the porch, came to the door. She smiled and spoke, but her voice was drowned in the yelping of the dogs, which were trying to climb over the fence to get at the stranger.

There was something admirable, if slightly discourteous, in the fearless manner in which Westerfelt leaned over the fence and, with the butt of his riding-whip, struck the animals squarely in the face, coolly laughing as he did so.

"You, Tige! you, Pomp!" cried the woman, running to them and picking up sticks and stones and hurling them at the animals, "down thar, I say!"

"They have forgotten me," said Westerfelt, with a laugh, as the dogs retreated behind the house, and he reached over the ramshackle gate to shake hands.

"But I hain't, John," she replied, cordially. "I wasn't lookin' fer you quite so soon, though. I reckon you must 'a' rid purty peert."

"Generally do," he made answer, "though I started early this morning, and lost half an hour at Long's shop, where I got my horse shod."

"Put up yore animal," she said. "That's the stable thar, an' you know better how to

feed 'im 'an I do. Luke's gone down to the livery-stable to look atter things fer you, but he'll be back 'fore supper-time."

Westerfelt led his horse into the yard, and to the well near the door.

He pushed the bucket into the opening, and allowed the wooden windlass to fly round of its own accord till the bucket struck the water.

"Thirsty?" she asked. "I'll git the gourd."

He nodded. "And I want to water my horse; every branch and creek is bridged for the last ten miles."

While she was in the house he wound up the bucket, swearing at the horse for continually touching an inquisitive nose to his moving elbow. She returned with a great gourd dipper. He rinsed it out, and, filling it, drank long and deeply. Then he refilled the gourd and offered it to her.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I forgot my politeness."

"I ain't dry," she said. "I was jest a-lookin' at you, John; you look so much older an' different-like."

"Oh, I reckon I'm all right," he said. "How's Luke?" emptying the bucket into the trough and watching the horse drink.

"As well as common; me an' him wus both

bound fer you to git the livery-stable, an' we are glad the trade's closed. It will seem like ol' times to have a body from Fannin over heer. As soon as you writ the price you wus willin' to give in a lumpin' sum, Luke set to scheming. He ain't no fool, if I do say it. Horton an' Webb had the'r eyes on the stable, an' Luke thinks they'd a-raised his bid, but they 'lowed he wus biddin' fur himself, an' knowed he couldn't raise the money. Mis' Thorp wus in heer this mornin', an' she said Jasper Webb swore like rips when the administrator tol' 'im the trade wus closed with Luke as yore agent. You orter do well with the investment; you got it cheap; you know how to keep up stock, an' the hack-line will pay with the mail it carries an' the passenger travel twixt heer an' Darley."

"I'm satisfied," he said, and he took the saddle and bridle from his horse and turned the animal into the little log stable.

"Hain't you goin' to feed 'im?" she asked, hospitably, as he was closing the door; "the's some fodder overhead, an' the corn is in re'ch through the crack above the trough."

"Not yet," he returned; "I fed him some shelled corn at the shop. I'll give him a few ears at supper-time."

The slanting rays of the sun streamed from a saffron sky in the west and blazed in the red, yellow, and pink foliage on the mountain-side. The light brought into clearer outline the brown peaks and beetling crags that rose bleak and bare above the wealth of color, beyond the dark, evergreen stretches of pines and mountain cedars. The gorgeous tail of a peacock spread and gleamed under the cherry-trees in the back yard. A sleek calf was running back and forth in a little lot, and a brindled cow was bellowing mellowly, her head thrown up as she cantered down the road, her heavy bag swinging under her.

At the sight of the woman a flock of ducks, chickens, and geese gathered round her. She shooed the fowls away with her apron. "They want the'r supper," she said, as she led her guest back to the front yard. She went to the gate and looked down the road. "I see Luke at the branch," she added, coming back to him; "he'd be on faster ef he knowed you wus heer."

Luke Bradley was about fifty years of age. He had blue eyes, a long body, long arms, and long legs. His hair was reddish brown and his face florid and freckled. He walked

with a shambling gait, stooped considerably, and swung his arms. He seldom wore a coat, and on days as mild as this his shirt-sleeves were always rolled up. He presented a striking contrast to John Westerfelt, who, by the people of that remote section, might have been considered something of a swell.

"How are you, ol' hoss?" Bradley laughed, as he swung the sagging gate open and grasped his friend's hand. "Glad to see you; I've done nothin' but fight tongue battles fer you all day. Webb has been cussin' me black an' blue fer biddin' agin 'im fer a stranger, but thar's one consolation — we've got 'im on the hip."

Westerfelt laughed pleasantly as he followed his host into the sitting-room. "Much obliged to you, Luke. I'm glad I took your advice about the investment."

"Me'n Marthy wus both dead set on gettin' you over heer," Luke said, as he placed a chair for Westerfelt in front of the fire. "Both of us 'low a change will do you good."

Mrs. Bradley sat down in a corner and spread out her ample homespun skirt and began to run the hem of her apron through her fat, red fingers.

"Me'n Luke's been talkin' it over," she

said, with some embarrassment; "we 'lowed you mought mebby be willin' to put up with us; we've got a spare room, an' you know about how we live. You've lied unmercifully ef you don't like my cookin'," she concluded, with an awkward little laugh.

"I never lie," he retorted, smiling. "It's been a year since I ate at your house, but I can taste your slice-potato pie yet, and your egg-bread and biscuits, ugh!"

She laughed. "You'll stay, then?"

"I'm afraid not. I've packed up some pieces of furniture—a bed and one thing or other—and I calculated that I'd occupy the room over the stable. I'd like to be near my business. I reckon I can get my meals down at the hotel. I'll stay with you to-night, though; the wagon won't come till to-morrow."

"Well, I'm disappointed, shore 'nough," said Mrs. Bradley. "I had clean forgot the room at the stable, an' I ought to 'a' knowed, too, that Saunders' boys bunked thar. Well, I won't raise no objections; Mis' Boyd, a widow woman, is keepin' the hotel now, and folks say she feeds well an' cheap enough. She's from Tennessee, an's got a good-lookin', sprightly daughter. Nobody knows a thing about 'em;

they don't talk much about the'rse'ves. They tuk the hotel when Rick Martin sold out last fall, an' they've been thar ever sence."

Supper was served in the room adjoining the kitchen. After it was over, Westerfelt and his host went back to the sitting-room. Alf, a colored farm-hand, was heaping logs on the old-fashioned dog-irons in the wide fireplace, and a mass of fat pine burning under the wood lighted the room with a soft red glow.

Westerfelt looked round him in surprise. While they were at supper the carpet had been taken up, the floor swept clean, and a number of chairs placed against the wall round the room.

"Marthy's doin's," Bradley explained, sheepishly; "don't hold me accountable; she's arranged to give you a shindig to introduce you to the young folks round about."

Just then Mrs. Bradley came in.

"Sweep the hearth, Alf," she said, pointing to a live coal that had popped out on the floor. "Didn't I tell you never to put on them chestnut logs? Do you want to burn the roof over our heads? Give it to me!" She snatched the unwieldy bundle of broom-

straw from him. "Go tell Mis' Snow I'm much obleeged fer the cheers, an' ef I need any more I'll send fer um atter 'while. Tell 'er ef she don't let Mary an' Ella come I'll never set foot in her house agin."

"What's all this for?" asked Westerfelt.

"*You.*" She slapped him familiarly on the arm. "I'm goin' to give you a mount'in welcome. This settlement is full o' nice gals, an' you hain't the least idee how much excitement thar's been sence the report went out that you are gwine to live amongst us. I'm the most popular woman in Cartwright, jest beca'se I know you. I tell you I've been blowin' yore horn. I've talked a sight about you, an' you must do yore best an' look yore purtiest. Oh, yore clothes is all right!" (seeing that he was looking doubtfully at his boots and trousers). "They hain't a dressy set over heer." Her husband was leaving the room, and she waited till he had closed the door after him. "I want to talk to you like a mother, John," she said, sitting down near him and holding the bundle of broom between her knees. "The truth is, I've had a sight o' worry over you. I often lie awake at night thinkin' about you, an' wonderin' ef yore ma wouldn't blame me ef

she wus alive fer not lookin' atter you more. I've heerd what a solitary life you've been livin' sence she died. God knows she wus a big loss, an' it does bring a great change to part with sech a friend, but, from what I heer, you let 'er death bother you most too much. Why, folks tell me you hain't at all like you used to be, an' that you jest stayed at home an' never went about with the young folks any more. You don't look as well as you did the last time I seed you, nuther. I reckon it's yore way o' livin', but you jest sha'n't do that away over heer. You've got to be natural like other young folks, an' you jest shall, ef I have anything to say in the matter. John, yore mamma was the best friend I ever had, an'—"

She paused. Luke was hallooing to some one down the road, and Westerfelt heard the rumble of wheels over a distant bridge. Mrs. Bradley went to the door and went out.

"They are comin', the whole caboodle of 'em!" she cried, excitedly. "I declare, I believe I enjoy a party as much as any gal that ever lived, an' at my age, too—it's shameful. I'd be talked about in some places." She laid her hands on the shoulders of her guest, her

face beaming. "Now, ef you want to primp up a little an' bresh that hoss-hair off'n yore pants, go in yore room. It's at the end o' the back porch. Alf's already tuck yore saddle-bags thar."

Chapter V

HIS room was a small one. It had a sloping ceiling, and a little six-paned window. A small, oblong stove stood far enough back in the capacious fireplace to allow its single joint of pipe to stand upright in the chimney. There was a high-posted bed, a wash-stand, a mirror, and a split-bottomed chair.

He sat down in the chair, rested his elbows on his knees, and leaned forward. Despite his determination to begin life anew, he was thinking of Sally Dawson's death and burial—the old woman who was leading the life of a recluse, and hating all her kind, him in particular. He put his hand in his coat-pocket and drew out a thick envelope containing the dead girl's letter, and read it as he had done almost every day since it came to him. It was part of the punishment he was inflicting on himself. He had been tempted a thousand times to destroy the letter, but had never done so. He forgot that a gay party of young people were assembling in the next room; he was

oblivious of the noise of moving chairs, the creaking floor, loud laughter, and the hum of voices. Fate had set him aside from the rest of the world, he told himself; he was living two lives, one in the present, the other in the past.

Westerfelt was suddenly reminded of where he was by the sound of some one tuning a fiddle in the sitting-room. He put the letter into his pocket, rose, and brushed his hair before the mirror. There was a clatter of heavy boots in the entry opposite his door; four or five young men had come out to wash their hands in the pans on the long shelf; they were passing jokes, laughing loudly, and playfully striking at one another. Two of them clinched arms and began to wrestle. Westerfelt heard them panting and grunting as they swayed back and forth, till the struggle was ended by one of them shoving the other violently against the wall. Westerfelt opened the door. A stout, muscular young giant was pinning a small man to the weather-boarding and making a pretence at choking him.

"Lord, H'ram, stop!" gasped the victim; "yore sp'ilin' my necktie an' collar."

"'Gin the rules to wear 'em," was the laughing reply. "Heer, Joe, you sprinkle 'im while I hold 'im!"

This command was about to be obeyed, when Mrs. Bradley suddenly appeared.

"Boys, boys, behave!" she cried, and as the wrestlers separated she continued, apologetically, "I clean forgot thar wusn't a sign of a towel on the roller; I wonder what you intended to wipe on; here, take this one, an' hang it up when you're through." Then she turned to Westerfelt's door and looked into his room.

"Are you ready, young man?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, coming out.

"Gentlemen," she said, "quit thar a minute! This is John Westerfelt, my old friend. Mind you look atter yore intrusts. The boys over in Fannin know how to please the gals. Ef you don't watch sharp he'll cut you every one out."

The two men holding the towel between them gave him their moist hands, and those at the basins nodded. Mrs. Bradley drew him into the sitting-room. The buzz of conversation ceased as she introduced him. They all rose, bowed, and sat down again, but no one spoke. He tried to detain his hostess, but she would not stay.

"I've got to look atter the rest," she said. "You must talk to some o' these folks. They

didn't come here jest to look at you. Here, Jennie Wynn, turn yore face round, an' give Frank a chance to talk to Lou." She whisked off into another room, and Westerfelt found himself facing a blushing maiden with a round face, dark hair and eyes.

"Excuse my back," she said over her shoulder to Frank Hansard.

"It *hain't* as purty as yore face, ef you *have* got on a new dress," he replied, laughing.

"Hush, Frank; hain't you got no manners?" She meant that he was showing discourtesy by continuing to talk to her when she had just been introduced to a stranger.

"You ought not to be hard on him," said Westerfelt; "he must have meant what he said."

"You are jest like all the rest, I reckon," she said; "men think girls don't care for nothin' but sweet talk."

Just then the old negro fiddler moved into the chimney-corner and raked his violin with his bow. Jennie Wynn knew that he was about to ask the couples to take their places for the first dance. She did not want Westerfelt to feel obliged to ask her to be his partner, so she pretended to be interested in the talk of a couple on her left.

"Do they dance the lancers?" asked Westerfelt.

"No, jest the reg'lar square dance. Only one or two know the lancers, an' they make a botch of it whenever they try to teach the rest. Uncle Mack cayn't play the music for it, anyway, though he swears he can."

She glanced across the room at a pretty little girl with short curly hair, slender body, and small feet, and added, significantly, "Sarah Wambush is our brag dancer."

He understood what she meant. "Too short for a fellow as tall as I am, though," he said.

"Git yo' pahtners fer de quadrille!" cried the fiddler, in a sing-song voice, quite in harmony with his music. Westerfelt did not want to dance. He had ridden hard that day, and was tired and miserable, but he saw no way of escape. The party had been given in his honor, and he must show appreciation of it.

"Will you dance it with me?" he asked the girl at his side. "I am not a good dancer, and I am stiff from riding to-day."

"Old Mack will soon take that out of you," she laughed, as she gladly nodded her acceptance. She put out her hand to his. "Quick!" she cried; "let's git that place near the door—

it's head, and we can be opposite Sarah and Nelse Baker." He followed her across the room. He felt as undignified as if he were romping with a child. The room was not large enough for two sets, so only one of four couples was formed. Old Mack noticed that three couples were left sitting, and cried out, autocratically, "Double on de sides!" Two couples sprang eagerly forward and took places, leaving one couple alone in a corner. The girl remaining with her partner attracted Westerfelt's attention. She had rich brown hair, deep gray eyes, a small, well-shaped mouth, and a rather sad but decidedly pretty face. There was something very graceful and attractive in the general contour of her body—her small waist, her broad shoulders and rounding chest, her well-formed head, and the artistic arrangement of her abundant hair. There was something, too, in the tasteful simplicity of her gray tailor-made gown that reminded Westerfelt of the dress of young ladies he had seen on short visits to the larger towns in the State.

Her companion was the most conspicuous person in the room. He was above medium height, and had a splendid physique—broad shoulders, muscular limbs, light brown eyes,

short brown beard, and long curling hair. He wore a navy-blue sack-coat, large checked trousers tucked in the tops of his boots, a gray woollen shirt, and a broad leather belt. He was the only man in the room who had not taken off his hat. It was very broad, the brim was pinned up on one side by a little brass ornament, and he wore it on the back of his head.

Westerfelt caught the eye of his partner, and asked: "Who is the fellow with the hat on?"

"Don't you know him?" she asked, in surprise. "Why, that's Toot Wambush, Sarah's brother."

"Why don't he take off his hat?"

"For want of better sense, I reckon." Then she laughed, impulsively. "I'll tell you why he always keeps it on in the house. He was at a party over at Sand Bank last spring, an'—"

"Han's to yo' pahtners!" cried out Uncle Mack, as he drew his bow across three or four strings at once, producing a harmony of bass, alto, and treble sounds. "Salute de lady on yo' right!"

Whack!

The bridge of the fiddle had fallen. Everybody laughed over Uncle Mack's discom-

fiture, as he rubbed the rosin out of his eyes and grunted, half amused, half vexed at the accident. He held the violin between his knees and proceeded to adjust the bridge.

"You were telling me why that fellow keeps on his hat," Westerfelt reminded his partner.

"Oh yes!" laughed the girl, "that's so. Toot's never satisfied if he ain't in a row o' some sort. He will always manage to pick a quarrel out of something. He's mighty troublesome, especially when he's drinkin'. He was pretty full over there that night, an' kept dancin' with his hat on. Mis' Lumpkin, who give the dance, asked 'im quietly to take it off an' behave like a gentleman. That made 'im mad, an' he swore he'd die first. Then some o' the boys tuk Mis' Lumpkin's part, an' tol' 'im the hat would come off ur he'd go out. It 'ud be a treat to see Toot Wambush mad if you could feel sure you wouldn't get hit. He clamped his hands together behind 'im an' yelled to Uncle Mack to stop fiddlin'; then he 'lowed ef any man thar tried to oust 'im he'd put windows in 'im. Frank Hansard, Lum Evans, and Andy Treadwell made signs at one another an' closed in on 'im. They didn't fully realize who they had to deal with, though. I hain't got much use for Toot, but he'll fight a circular saw bare-

handed. He backed into a corner over a pile o' split pine-knots an' grabbed one that Thad Muntford declared wuz shaped like the jaw-bone o' Samson's ass. It had a long handle an' weighed about fifteen pounds. On my word, it seemed to me he slugged Frank and Andy at exactly the same time. You could 'a' heerd the'r skulls pop to the gate. They both fell kerflop in front of 'im. That left jest Lum Evans facin' 'im 'thout a thing in his hands. He dodged Toot's pine-knot when he swung it at 'im an' then Toot laughed an' thowed it down and shook his fists at 'im, an' tol' 'im to come on for a fair fisticuff. Jest then Frank come to an' started to rise, but Toot sent 'im back with a kick in the face, an' helt 'im down with 'is boot on 'is neck. Andy backed out of the door, an' then Toot ordered Uncle Mack to play, an' tried to get the girls to dance with 'im, but nobody would, so he danced by 'isse'f, while Doc White an' Mis' Lumpkin worked on the wounded men in the next room. Since then Toot has al'ays wore his hat at dances. He swore he never would go to one unless he did."

Westerfelt laughed. "Who's the young lady?" he asked.

"Harriet Floyd. Her mother keeps the

hotel. They 'ain't been here so mighty long; they're Tennessee folks."

"Sweethearts?"

"Don't know. He's 'er very shadder. I reckon she likes that sort of a man; she's peculiar, anyway."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't know, but she is." Jennie shrugged her shoulders. "She don't git on with us. In a crowd o' girls she never has much to say; it always seemed to me she was afraid somebody would find out some'n' about 'er. She never mentions Tennessee. But she's a great favorite with all the boys. They'd be a string o' 'em round 'er now, but they don't want to make Toot mad."

"Right han' ter yo' pahtners," called out Uncle Mack, rapping on the back of his fiddle with his bow. "Salute yo' pahtners; balance all!" and the dance began. "Swing corners! Fust fo' for'ards, en back agin!"

"Faster, Unc' Mack!" cried Sarah Wambush, as she swung past the old negro. "That hain't the right time!"

"Wait till he gets limbered up," cried Frank Hansard across to her. "He hain't drawed a bow in two weeks, an' has been ploughin' a two-hoss turnover."

Louder and louder grew the music and the clatter of shoes and boots. The air was filled with dust; old Mack's fiddle could hardly be heard above his shouts and the laughter of the dancers. Luke and Mrs. Bradley stood in the open door leading to the kitchen, both smiling. Mrs. Bradley seemed pleased with the ease with which Westerfelt appeared to be adapting himself to the company.

"Git the straws, Luke!" urged Frank Hansard, as the "grand chain" brought him near Bradley. "Give it to us lively."

"I can't beat straws," said Luke.

Hearing this, old Mack uttered a contradictory guffaw, and shook his gray wool in high amusement.

"Go on, Luke," said his wife, as she pushed him towards the fiddler; "you kin, you know you kin."

Luke edged round between the dancers and the fire, and took two smooth sour-wood sticks from Mack's coat-pocket. The old negro laughed and sang all the louder as he held his head to one side and Luke began to thrum the strings in time to the music.

"Whoo-ee!" shouted Frank, and the dance waxed faster and more noisy, till the exhausted

fiddler brought it to an end by crying out: "Seat yo' pahtners."

Jennie sat down in a row of girls against the wall, and Mrs. Bradley came to Westerfelt.

"You must stir round," she said; "I want you to git acquainted. Come over here an' talk to Sarah Wambush." He followed her across the room. Sarah was seated next to Harriet Floyd. As he sat down near Sarah, he fancied that Harriet, whose profile was towards him, gave him a glance out of the corner of her eye, but she turned her head and continued talking to Toot Wambush. There was something he liked in the ease of her position as she sat, balling her handkerchief in a hand hidden half in the pocket of her jacket. He thought her easily the prettiest girl in the room, and he vaguely resented the fact that she was receiving marked attention from a man of Wambush's character.

He wanted to knock the fellow's hat off, and tell him that a new man had come into the settlement who could not, and would not, stand such nonsense in the presence of ladies.

He listened to Sarah's prattle with only half an ear, adding a word now and then to keep her tongue going, till another dance was called. Nelse Baker asked Sarah to be

his partner, and she rose. Finding himself alone, Westerfelt got up. As he did so, he caught another glance from the corner of Harriet Floyd's eye, but she looked away quickly. She thought he was going to ask her to dance with him when he turned towards her, but he had decided to invite a little plain girl who sat next the wall, hemmed in by the crossed legs of Wambush. The girl flushed over the unexpected attention and rose at once.

"That couple don't seem to be dancing," Westerfelt remarked, with a glance at Wambush and Harriet, as he and his partner took a place in front of the fire.

"No," she answered. "Toot sorter sprained his foot at a log-rollin' to-day."

"And she won't dance without him, is that it?"

"She would, but none o' the boys won't ask her when Toot's on hand."

"Ah, I see—engaged?"

"No. I reckon not; but Toot sorter lays claim to 'er though."

"And she don't object?"

She looked up and laughed. "It don't look much like it, does it?"

"I don't know; I never saw them together before."

"Oh, I see; well, he's her regular stand-by; he takes 'er to all the frolics, an' the picnics, an' to meetin'. He lives out at his father's, a mile or so from town, but he gets meals mighty often at the hotel."

As the dance began Westerfelt glanced again at Harriet Floyd. He could not explain the interest he had in her. She was looking straight into his eyes, as if she had divined that he was talking about her. He was almost certain that she colored slightly as she glanced on to Mrs. Bradley.

Mrs. Bradley smiled and moved towards her, between the wall and the flying heels of the revolving circle. Westerfelt, in turning his "lady on the right," came near them as Mrs. Bradley was saying:

"I want you to get acquainted with my Fannin young man, Harriet. He's mighty nice."

At that moment Harriet caught Westerfelt's eye again, and knew that he had heard the remark.

She nodded, and said, evasively, "You are having a nice dance, Mrs. Bradley; they all seem to be enjoying it very much."

Westerfelt had not heard her voice before, and he liked it. He noticed that she did not

leave off her final g's, and that she spoke more clearly and correctly than the others. He concluded that she must have received a better education than the average young lady in that section. The dance was nearly ended when Westerfelt saw Wambush bend over and whisper something to her. She nodded, drew her white shawl round her shoulders, rose, and followed him out through the kitchen.

"Gone to try the moonlight," remarked the little gossip at Westerfelt's side, with a knowing smile.

"All promenade!" shouted the fiddler, the dance being over. The couples went outside. They passed Wambush and Harriet on the porch, leaning against the banisters in the moonlight. Her head was covered with her shawl, and her companion was very near her.

"Never mind; we won't bother you," called out Sarah Wambush, who, with Nelson Baker, led the promenaders. "We're goin' down the walk; you needn't run off on our account."

All the others laughed, and Sarah, thinking she had said something bright, added: "Harriet's got a bad cold, an' Buddy's sprained his foot; they're takin' the'r medicine."

This evoked another laugh, but neither

Wambush nor his companion heeded it. Westerfelt observed that they turned their backs to the promenaders and seemed to be talking earnestly.

"It's cool out here," said Westerfelt's partner as they were returning from the walk under the arbor of grape-vines. "They are all goin' inside."

At about twelve o'clock the guests began to leave. Harriet Floyd, followed by Wambush, came in hurriedly after most of the others had gone. Westerfelt was near Mrs. Bradley when she came to say good-night. He heard her say she had enjoyed herself very much, but she spoke hurriedly, as if she did not want to be the last to leave. Westerfelt watched them go through the gate, but he turned away when Wambush put his arm round her waist and lifted her lightly into his buggy.

He was sure he would never like the fellow.

Just before Westerfelt went to bed, Bradley looked into his room.

"I 'lowed I'd better take a peep at that stove o' yore'n, an' see that thar ain't any danger o' fire while we are asleep," he said. "How'd you make out to-night?"

"First rate."

"I 'lowed you wus gittin' on well enough—talked to most all the gals, I reckon."

"All but one, I think—that Miss Floyd."

"Ah, Toot's gal; mortgaged property, I reckon, or soon will be; she's as purty as red shoes, though, an' as peert as a cricket."

Westerfelt sat down on the side of his bed and drew off his boots.

"What sort of a man is he, Luke?"

"Bad—bad; no wuss in seven States."

"Fighting man?"

"Yes; an' whiskey an' moonshinin' an' what not; ain't but one good p'int in 'im, an' that hain't wuth much in time o' peace. I reckon ef yo're through with it, I'd better take yore candle; sometimes I have to strike a light 'fore day."

"All right." Westerfelt got into the bed and drew the covers up to his chin. There was a thumping on the floor beneath the house.

"It's the dogs," explained Luke, at the door. "They are a-flirtin' the'r tails about. They'll settle down terrectly. What time do you want to rise in the mornin'?"

"When you do. I'm no hand to lie in bed."

"You'll have to crawl out with the chickens then."

"Luke!"

Bradley turned at the door. "What is it, John?"

"I don't like Wambush's looks."

Bradley laughed, with his hand over his mouth. "Nobody else does to hurt."

"Do you think he would trifle with the affections of a young girl?"

"Would he?" Again Bradley laughed. "Well, I reckon he would; he is a bad man, I tell you. We'd never 'low him to enter our house, ef we could help it, but he'd raise the very devil ef he was slighted. We'd never heer the end of it. Ef we'd left 'im out to-night I'd 'a' had 'im to fight out thar in the front yard while the party was goin' on. I wouldn't mind it much, but my wife never wanted me in a row."

"This girl he was with to-night, has she father or brothers?"

"No, the's jest her an' 'er mother."

"Isn't it pretty risky for her to go with him so much?"

"Oh, I reckon she kin take care o' herse'f; she has that look to me; besides, she's been warned; my wife an' among 'em has talked to her plenty o' times. I reckon she knows what he is well enough. Do you

know I had my eye on you an' her to-night?"

"What do you mean, Luke?" Westerfelt managed to avoid meeting the eye of his host as he put the question. He could not remember ever having waited for a reply with more concern.

"Oh, I don't know," smiled Bradley, knowingly; "but somehow you an' her seemed to me to be head an' shoulders above the rest o' that silly crowd. The idee just popped into my head that you'd make a spankin' team, an' then ag'in" (Bradley laughed) "I tuck notice that you never went up to 'er an' talked to her free-like, as you did to most o' the rest, an' I remembered I wus jest that big a fool when I fust met Marthy. But you wus a-watchin' of her, though. I'll bet ef you looked at 'er once you did forty times. As for her, I happen to know some'n funny. You see, I heerd her an' Wambush a-talkin' on the back porch when I went out thar to draw up a bucket o' water. The rope had got tangled somehow, an' I had to fix it, an' while I was doin' of it I couldn't help heerin' what they said, beca'se Toot wus as mad as a wet hen, an' didn't keer a dern who heerd 'im."

"Mad—at her?" ejaculated Westerfelt.

"Yes; it seemed that he had bantered her to say what she thought about you, an' she'd up an' told him you wus about the best-lookin' man she'd ever seed, an' that you looked like a born gentleman, an' one thing anuther. I couldn't heer all that passed betwixt 'em, but he wus as nigh a' explosion as I ever seed 'im git without goin' off. You'd better look out. He won't do to meddle with. He's a bad egg—an' tricky."

When Bradley had gone, leaving his guest in the dark, Westerfelt found himself unable to sleep for thinking of what Luke had said.

"I wonder, really," he mused, "why I didn't talk to her as I did to the others, for I certainly wanted to bad enough."

Chapter VI

WESTERFELT'S room at the stable was at the head of a flight of steps leading up from the office. It had only a single window, but it commanded a partial view of several roads leading into the village, and a sparse row of houses on the opposite side of the street. In front of the stable stood a blacksmith shop, and next to it, on the right, the only store in the village. The store building had two rooms, the front being used for dry-goods, groceries, and country produce, the one in the rear as the residence of the storekeeper. Next to the store, in a sort of lean-to, whitewashed shed with green shutters, was a bar-room. Farther on in this row, opposite the jail of the place, and partially hidden by the thinning foliage of sycamore, chestnut, and mulberry trees, was the hotel. It was the only two-storied building in the village. It had dormer windows in the roof and a long veranda in front.

Somehow this building interested Wester-

felt more than any of the others. He told himself it was because he intended to get his meals there. Finally he decided, as he was not to dine that day with the Bradleys, that he ought to go over at once and speak to the landlady about his board. As he arranged his cravat before the little walnut-framed mirror, which the stable-boys in placing his furniture had hung on the wall, together with a hair-brush and a comb tied to strings, he wondered, with no little pleasurable excitement, if Harriet Floyd had anything to do with the management of the house, and if he would be apt to meet her that morning.

Descending to the office on his way out, he found a young man writing at a desk. It was William Washburn, the book-keeper for the former owners of the livery-stable, whom Westerfelt had retained on Bradley's recommendation. Washburn was copying accounts from a ledger on to sheets of paper.

"How are they running?" asked Westerfelt, looking over the young man's shoulder.

"Lots of 'em hain't wuth the paper they are on," replied Washburn. "The old firm knowed everybody in creation, an' never could refuse a soul. When you bought the accounts you didn't buy gold dollars."

"I know that, but Bradley said he thought I might collect a good many of them."

"Oh yes; maybe a half, or tharabouts."

"Well," said Westerfelt, indifferently, "we'll do the best we can."

"Thar's a big un that's no good." Washburn pointed to an account he had just copied.

"Who's it on?"

"Toot Wambush."

"How much?"

"Seventy-eight dollars an' fifty cents. It's been runnin' on fer two yeer, an' thar hain't a single credit on it. He never was knowed to pay a cent to nobody."

"Don't let anything out to him till the account is paid."

Washburn looked up with a dubious smile. "He'll raise a' awful row. He never wants to go anywhar tell he's drinkin', an' then he's as ill as a snake an' will fight at the drop of a hat. Nobody in Cartwright dares to refuse 'im credit."

"I will, if he doesn't pay up."

"D' y' ever see 'im?"

"Yes, last night."

"I'd be cautious if I wus you; he's a dangerous man, an' takes offence at the slightest thing."

"If he gets mad at me for refusing to let him drive my horses when he owes a bill like that, and won't pay it, he can do so. I obey the law myself, and I will not let drunkards run my business to suit themselves."

"He's talking 'bout goin' out to his father's this morning, an' wants to drive the same rig he had last night."

"I did not know he had my turnout last night."

"Yes, you wusn't heer, an' I knowed he'd make trouble if I refused him."

"That's all right, but don't let him get in any deeper till the old debt is settled. I'm going over to the hotel a minute."

It was a warm day for October, and the veranda of the hotel was crowded with loungers, homely men in jeans, slouched hats, and coarse brogans. Some of them sat on the benches, supported by the square columns, at the end of the veranda; a few had tilted their chairs against the wall, and others stood in groups and talked county politics.

They all eyed Westerfelt curiously, and some of them nodded and said "Howdy do" as he passed. He entered the parlor on the right of the long hall which ran through the centre of the main wing. A slovenly negro

girl was sweeping the hearth. She leaned her broom against the cottage organ and went to call her mistress.

A sombre rag carpet was on the floor, and a rug made of brilliant red and blue scraps of silk lay in front of the fire. On a centre-table, covered with a red flannel cloth, stood a china vase, filled with colored leaves and grasses, and lying near it was a plush photograph album. The rest of the furniture consisted of an ancient hair-cloth sofa, an old rocking-chair, the arms of which had been tied on with twine, and a sewing-machine. The windows had cheap lace curtains, stiff enough to stand alone, and green shades with tinselled decorations. The plastered walls were whitewashed and the ceiling was faded sky-blue.

He heard a door close somewhere in the rear, and then with a light step Harriet Floyd entered.

"Good-morning," she said, slightly embarrassed. "Mother was busy, and so she asked me to come in."

"I believe we were introduced, in a general way, last night," he said. "I hope you remember."

"Oh yes, indeed," she made answer.

He thought she was even prettier in the daylight in her simple calico dress and white apron than she had appeared the evening before, and he was conscious that the sharp realization of this fact was causing him to pause unnecessarily long before speaking in his turn. But he simply could not help it; he experienced a subtle pleasure he could not explain in watching her warm, slightly flushed face. Her eyes held a wonderful charm for him. There seemed to be a strange union of forces between her long lashes and the pupils of her eyes, the like of which he believed he had never met before.

"I've come to see if I can get my meals here," he said. "It is near my place of business, and I've heard a lot of good things about your mother's table."

"We always have plenty of room," she answered, simply. "Mother will be glad to have you. Won't you take a seat?" She sat down on the sofa and he took a chair opposite her.

"I suppose you enjoyed the party last night," he said, tentatively.

He fancied she raised her brows a little and glanced at him rather steadily, but she looked down when she replied.

"Yes; Mrs. Bradley always gives us a good time."

"But you were not dancing."

"No, I don't care much for it, and Toot—Mr. Wambush—had sprained his foot and said he'd rather not dance."

"That was very kind of you. Not many girls would be so considerate of a fellow's feelings."

She looked down at a brindled cat that came into the room and rubbed its side against her skirt.

"I don't think girls care enough about the feelings of men," she answered, after a little pause. "If they would treat them nicer they would be better."

"You think women can reform men then?"

"Yes, I do; though a man that drinks is mighty hard to manage. Sometimes they can't help it, and they drink more when women show that they have lost confidence in them."

He liked what she had said, notwithstanding its being an indirect defence of Wambush, but was prevented from answering by hearing his name angrily called in the street. This was followed by heavy footsteps on the veranda.

"Whar is that d—d livery man?" The voice was now in the hall.

"It's Toot Wambush!" cried the girl, rising quickly and turning to the door. "I am afraid he—" Just then the young ruffian entered. His red face and unsteady walk showed that he had been drinking.

"Say, Miss Harriet, have you seed — oh, heer you are!"— he broke off as he noticed Westerfelt. "You are the one man in the United Kingdom that I want to see jest at this present moment. Bill Washburn 'lowed he had orders from you not to let me have anything out'n yore shebang; is that so?"

"I'd rather not talk business here," replied Westerfelt. He rose and coolly looked Wambush in the face. "If you say so, we'll walk across to the stable."

"No," sneered Wambush, "this heer's good enough fur me; I hain't got no secrets frum them mount'in men out thar nur this young lady. I jest want ter know now—right *now*, by Glory! ef you ever give sech orders."

"Do you think this is a proper place to settle such a matter?" calmly asked Westerfelt.

"D—d you; you are a coward; you are afeerd to say so!"

Harriet Floyd, with a white, startled face,

tried to slip between the two men, but Wambush roughly pushed her aside.

"You *are* afeerd!" he repeated, shaking his fist in Westerfelt's face.

"No, I'm not," replied Westerfelt. The corners of his mouth were drawn down and his chin was puckered. "I have fought some in my life, and sometimes I get as mad as the next one, but I still try to be decent before ladies. This is no place to settle a difficulty."

"Will you do it outside, then?" sneered Wambush.

Westerfelt hesitated, and looked at the crowd that filled the door and stood peering in at the window. Mrs. Floyd was running up and down in the hall, excitedly calling for Harriet, but the crowd was too anxious to hear Westerfelt's reply to notice her.

"If nothing else will suit you, yes," answered Westerfelt, calmly. "I don't think human beings ought to spill blood over a matter of business, and I don't like to fight a man that's drinking, but since you have behaved so in this lady's presence, I'm really kinder in the notion."

"Come on, then," blustered Wambush. "I'm either yore meat or you are mine." He turned to the door and pushed the crowd before

him as he stamped out of the hall into the street.

Harriet ran between Westerfelt and the door. She put her hands on his shoulders and looked at him beseechingly. "Don't go out there," she pleaded; "stay here and let him cool off; he is drinking! He's a dangerous man."

He took her hands and held them for an instant and then dropped them. "I'm afraid he's been humored too much," he smiled. "I'd never have any respect for myself if I was to back down now. I've known his kind to be cured by a good, sound thrashing, when nothing else would do any good."

She raised her hands again, but he avoided her gently and went out into the street. Wambush stood on the sidewalk a few yards from the door, one booted foot on the curbstone, the other on the ground. He had thrown his broad-brimmed hat on the ground, and tossed his long hair back over his shoulders. His left hand rested on his raised knee, his right was in the pocket of his short coat.

"Come on, if you ain't too weak-kneed," he jeered, as Westerfelt appeared on the veranda.

Westerfelt advanced towards Wambush,

but when he was within a few feet of him, Wambush suddenly drew a revolver, cocked it, and deliberately raised it. Westerfelt stopped and looked straight into Wambush's eyes.

"I'm unarmed," said he; "I never carry a pistol; is that the way you do your fighting?"

"That's yore lookout, not mine, d—n you!"

Just then Luke Bradley ran up the sidewalk and out on the veranda near Westerfelt. He had a warning on his lips, but seeing the critical situation he said nothing. A white, tigerish look came into the face of Westerfelt. The cords of his neck tightened as he leaned slowly towards Wambush. He was about to spring.

"Don't be a fool, John," cautioned Bradley. "Be ashamed o' yorese'f, Toot! Drap that gun, an' fight like a man ur not at all!"

Wambush's eye ran along the revolver, following every movement of Westerfelt's with the caution of a panther watching dangerous prey.

"One more inch and you are a dead man!" he said, slowly.

Mrs. Floyd, who was on the veranda, cried out and threw her arms round Harriet, who seemed ready to run between the two men.

No one quite saw how it happened, but Westerfelt suddenly bent near the earth and sprang forward. Wambush's revolver went off over his head, and before he could cock it again, Westerfelt, with a swift sweep of his arm, had sent it spinning through a window-pane in the hotel.

"Ah!" escaped somebody's lips in the silent crowd, and the two men, closely on the alert, faced each other.

"Part 'em, men; what are you about?" cried Mrs. Floyd.

"Yes, part 'em," laughed a man on the edge of the crowd; "somebody 'll get his beauty spiled; Toot kin claw like a pant'er; I don't know what t'other man kin do, but he looks game."

"No, let 'em fight it out fa'r an' squar'," suggested red-faced Buck Hillhouse, the barkeeper, in the autocratic tone he used in conducting cock-fights in his back yard.

The blood had left Westerfelt's face. Wambush's eyes gleamed desperately; disarmed, he looked less a man than an infuriated beast. Westerfelt was waiting for him to make the attack, but, unlike his antagonist, was growing calmer every second. All at once Wambush sent his right arm towards Westerfelt's face

so quickly that the spectators scarcely saw it leave his side, but it was not quicker than Westerfelt's left, which skilfully parried the thrust. Then, before Toot could shield himself, Westerfelt struck him with the force of a battering-ram squarely in the mouth.

Wambush whined in pain, spat blood from gashed lips, and shook his head like a lion wounded in the mouth. He ran backward a few feet to recover himself, and then, with a mad cry, rushed at Westerfelt and caught him by the throat. Westerfelt tried to shake him off, but he was unsuccessful. He attempted to strike him in the face, but Wambush either dodged the thrusts or caught them in his thick hair. It seemed that Westerfelt's only chance now was to throw his assailant down, but his strength had left him. Wambush's claws had sunk into his neck like prongs of steel. He could not breathe.

"Hit 'im in the bread-basket, John!" cried Luke Bradley.

It was a happy suggestion. Westerfelt struck Wambush in the stomach. With a gasp and an oath, Wambush doubled up and released Westerfelt's throat. The two men now clinched breast to breast, and, with arms round each other's bodies, each

began to try to throw the other down. They swung back and forth and from side to side, but they were well mated.

Westerfelt suddenly threw his left leg behind Wambush's heels and began to force him backward. In an instant Wambush would have gone down, but seeing his danger he wriggled out of Westerfelt's grasp, drew something from his coat pocket, and sprang towards him.

"Knife! knife! knife!" cried Luke Bradley in alarm. "Part 'em!"

"Yes, part 'em!" echoed the bar-keeper with an oath, as if the edge of his pleasure had been taken off by the more serious turn of affairs. Several men ran towards Wambush, but they were not quick enough. He had stabbed Westerfelt once in the breast and drawn back his arm for another thrust, when Luke Bradley caught his wrist. Wambush struck at Bradley with his left hand, but the bar-keeper caught it, and between him and Bradley, Wambush was overpowered.

"The sheriff's coming!" a voice exclaimed, as a big man rode up quickly and dismounted.

"Hello!" he cried, "I summon you, Buck Hillhouse, and Luke Bradley, in the name

o' the law to 'rest Wambush. Take that knife from 'im!"

"Arrest the devil!" came from Wambush's bloody lips. He made a violent effort to free himself, but the two men held him.

"I'll he'p yer, whether you deputize me or not!" grunted Bradley, as he hung to the hand which still held the knife. "I'll he'p yer cut 'is d—d throat, the cowardly whelp!"

"I've got nothin' 'gin nuther party," said the bar-keeper, "but I reckon I'll have to obey the law."

"He's attempted deliberate murder on a unarmed man," Bradley informed the sheriff; "fust with a gun an' then with a knife. Ef you don't jail 'im, Bale Warlick, you'll never hold office in Cohutta Valley agin."

The sheriff stepped up to Wambush.

"Drap that knife!" he ordered. "Drap it!"

"Go to h—!" Toot ceased his struggling and glared defiantly into the face of the sheriff.

"Drap that knife!" The sheriff was becoming angered. He grasped Wambush's hand and tried to take the knife away, but Toot's fingers were like coils of wire.

"I'll see you damned fust!" grunted Wambush, and, powerless to do anything else, he spat in the sheriff's face.

"D—n you, I'll kill you!" roared Warlick, and he struck Wambush on the jaw. Wambush tried to kick him in the stomach, but Bradley prevented it by jerking him backward. It now became a struggle between three men and one, and that one really seemed equal in strength to the other three.

"Drap the knife!" yelled Warlick again, and he drew a big revolver, and with the butt of it began to hammer Toot's clinched fingers. As he did this, Bradley and Hillhouse drew Wambush backward and down to the ground.

"I'll pay you for this, Bale Warlick," he groaned in pain, but he still held to the knife.

"Let go that knife," thundered the sheriff. "Let it a-loose, I tell you, or I'll mash your skull!"

"Not while I hold 'im, Bale," said the barkeeper, sullenly. "Law or no law, I won't he'p beat no man 'at's down!"

"Let go that knife!" The sheriff spoke the last word almost in a scream, and he beat Wambush's knuckles so furiously that the knife fell to the ground.

He then pinned Toot's legs to the earth with his knees, and held the knife up to a man in the crowd.

"Keep it jest like it is fur evidence," he panted. "Don't shet it up or tetch the blade."

Disarmed, Wambush seemed suddenly overcome with fear. He allowed the sheriff to jerk him to his feet, and walked passively between the three men across the street to the stone jail.

Westerfelt stood alone on the sidewalk. Everybody went to see Wambush locked up except Harriet and her mother. They instantly came out to Westerfelt. Harriet picked up a folded piece of letter paper.

"Did you drop this?" she asked.

He did not reply, but took the paper absently and thrust it into his coat pocket. It had fallen from Wambush's pocket. He was very white and leaned heavily against a sycamore-tree.

"Oh, he's cut your coat; look!" Harriet cried.

Still he did not speak. He looked down at the slit in the cloth and raised his hand towards it, but his arm fell limply and he swayed from side to side.

"Are you hurt?" asked Mrs. Floyd, anxiously.

"I think not," he said; "but maybe I am, a little."

Harriet opened his coat and screamed, "Oh, mother, he's cut! Look at the blood!"

He tried to button his coat, but could not use his fingers. "Only a scratch," he said.

"But your clothes are wet with blood," Harriet insisted, as she pointed to his trousers.

He stooped and felt them. They were damp and heavy. Then he raised his heel in his right boot, and let it down again.

"It's full," he said, with a sickly smile. "I reckon I *have* lost some blood. Why—why, I didn't feel it."

Martin Worthy, the storekeeper, ran across from the jail ahead of the others. Hearing Westerfelt's remark, he cried:

"My Lord! you must go inside an' lie down; fix a place, Miss Harriet, an' send fer a doctor, quick!"

Harriet ran into the house, and Mrs. Floyd and Worthy supported Westerfelt between them into a room adjoining the parlor. They made him lie on a bed, and Worthy opened his waistcoat and shirt.

"Good gracious, it's runnin' like a wet-weather spring," he said. "Have you sent fer a doctor?" he asked as Harriet came in.

"Yes; Dr. Lash, but he may not be at his office."

"Send for Dr. Wells," he ordered a man at the door. "That's right," he added to Harriet, who had knelt by the bed and was holding the lips of the wound together, "keep the cut closed as well as you kin! I'll go tell 'im to use my hoss."

As he went out there was a clatter of feet on the veranda. The people were returning from the jail. Westerfelt opened his eyes and looked towards the door.

"They'll crowd in here," said Harriet to her mother. "Shut the door; don't let anybody in except Mr. Bradley."

Mrs. Floyd closed the door in the face of the crowd, asking them to go outside, but they remained in the hall, silent and awed, waiting for news of the wounded man. Mrs. Floyd admitted Luke Bradley.

"My heavens, John, I had no idea he got such a clean sweep at you!" he said, as he approached the bed. "Ef I'd a-knowed this I'd 'a' killed the dirty scamp!"

"I'm all right," replied Westerfelt; "just a little loss of blood." But his voice was faint and his eyelids drooped despite his effort to keep them open. Worthy rapped at the door and was admitted.

"Doc Lash has rid out to Widow Tread-

well's," he announced. "He's been sent fer, an' ort ter git heer before long. It'll take a hour to git Wells, even ef he's at home."

Harriet Floyd glanced at her mother when she heard this. Her knees ached and her fingers felt stiff and numb, but she dared not stir.

Once Westerfelt opened his eyes and looked down at her.

"Do I hurt you?" she asked, softly.

"Not a bit." He smiled, and his eyes lingered on her face till their lids dropped over them.

Chapter VII

DR. LASH came a little earlier than he was expected. The wound was not really a fatal one, he said, but if Miss Harriet had not been so attentive and skilful in keeping the cut closed, the man would have bled to death.

Westerfelt dropped to sleep, and when he awoke it was night. A lamp, the light of which was softened by a pink shade, stood on a sewing-machine near the fireplace. At first he could not recall what had happened nor where he was, and he felt very weak and sleepy. After awhile, however, he became conscious of the fact that he was not alone. A slight figure was moving silently about the room, now at the fireplace, again at a table where some lint, bandages, and phials had been left. The figure approached his bed cautiously. It was Harriet Floyd. When she saw that he was awake, she started to move away, but he detained her.

"I'm a lot of trouble for a new boarder," he said, smiling. "This is my first day, and

yet I've turned your house into a fortification and a hospital."

"You are not a bit of trouble; the doctor said let you sleep as much as possible."

"I don't need sleep; I've been hurt worse than this before."

She put her hand on his brow. "It'll make you feverish to talk, Mr. Westerfelt; go to sleep."

"Did they jail Wambush?"

"Yes."

"Toughest customer I ever tackled." He laughed, dryly.

She made no reply. She went to the fire and began stirring the contents of a three-legged pot on the coals. To see her better, he turned over on his side. The bed slats creaked.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, running to him, "you'll break the stitches, and bleed again. Don't move that way."

He raised the blanket and looked down at his wound.

"I reckon they are holding all right, though I *did* feel a little twinge."

"You have not had any dinner or supper," she went on. "Dr. Lash said if you wanted anything I might give you some gruel

and milk. I've made it, and it is keeping warm at the fire. Will you take some?"

"No, I thank you; I can wait till breakfast. Then I'll set up at the table and eat a square meal; somehow, I'm not hungry. Wambush objected mightily to being jailed, didn't he?"

"You ought not to wait till breakfast," she said, looking at the fire; "you'd better let me give you some of this gruel."

"All right; you are the doctor."

She dipped up some of the gruel in a bowl, and, adding some milk to it, came back to him. But she was confronted by a difficulty. He could not eat gruel and milk from a spoon while lying on his back. He saw this, and put his hands on either side of him and started to sit up.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, setting the bowl on the floor and gently pushing him back on his pillow; "you must not!"

He laughed. "Just like a woman. You surely don't think I'm going to lie here for a week, like a sick cat, for such a little scratch. I've lost some blood, that's all." And before she could prevent it, he had drawn himself up and was smiling broadly.

"I can't look after sick folks," she said, in despair. "The doctor will blame me."

"I heard him say if you hadn't held my cut so well I'd have bled to death."

"Anybody else could have done it."

"Nobody else didn't."

"Do you want the gruel? Take it quick, and lie down again; you'll lose strength sitting up."

"You'll have to feed me," he said, opening his mouth. "I'm too blamed weak to sit up without propping with my hands, and they don't seem very good supports. Look how that one is wobbling."

She sat down on the edge of the bed, and without a word placed the bowl in her lap and her arm round him. Then neither spoke as she filled the spoon and held it to his lips. She felt him trying to steady his arms to keep his weight from her.

"It's really good," he said, as she filled the spoon the second time. "I had no idea I was so hungry; you say you made it?"

"Yes; there now, I'll have to wipe your chin; you ought not to talk when you are eating."

For several minutes neither spoke. He finished the bowl of gruel and lay down again.

"I feel as mean as a dog," he said, as she rose and drew the cover over him; "here I

am being nursed by the very fellow's sweetheart I tried my level best to do up."

She turned and placed the bowl on the table, and then went to the fire.

"I heard you were his girl last night," he went on. "Well, I'm glad I didn't kill him. I wouldn't have tried in anything but self-defence, for even if he did use a gun and knife, when I had none, he's got bulldog pluck, and plenty of it. Do you know, I felt like mashing the head of that sheriff for beating him like he did."

She sat down before the fire, but soon rose again. "If I stay here," she said, abruptly, and rather sharply, "you'll keep talking, and not sleep at all. I'm going into the next room — the parlor. If you want anything, call me and I'll come."

A few minutes after she left him he fell asleep. She put a piece of wood on the fire in the next room and sat down before it. She had left the door of his room ajar, and a ray of light from his lamp fell across the dark carpet and dimly illuminated the room. The hours passed slowly. No one in the house was astir. No sound came from the outside save the dismal barking of a dog down the road. She was fatigued and almost asleep,

when she was suddenly roused by a far-off shout.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!"

It seemed to come from the road leading down from the loftiest mountain peak. She held her breath and listened.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" It was nearer. Then she heard the steady tramp of horses' hoofs. She rose and went to the window, moving softly, that her ear might not lose any of the sounds. She raised the window cautiously and looked out. The moon was shining brightly, and down the street beyond the livery-stable she saw a body of horsemen.

"Great Heavens!" she exclaimed; "it's the 'Whitecaps'!"

She drew back behind the curtains as the horsemen rode up to the hotel and stopped. There were twenty or more, and each wore a white cap, a white mask, and a white sheet over the body.

"Thar's whar the scrimmage tuck place," explained some one in a muffled voice, and a white figure pointed to the spot where Westerfelt and Wambush had fought. "We must hurry an' take 'im out, an' have it over."

Harriet Floyd heard some one breathing

behind her. It was Westerfelt. His elbow touched her as he leaned towards the window and peered out. "Oh, it's you!" she cried. "Go back to bed, you—"

He did not seem to hear her. The moonlight fell on his face. It was ghastly pale. He suddenly drew back beside her to keep from being observed by the men outside. His lips moved, but they made no sound.

"Go back to bed," she repeated. She put out her hand and touched him, but she did not look at him, being unable to resist the fascination of the sight in the street.

"What do they want?" he whispered. He put his hand on an old-fashioned what-not behind him, and the shells and ornaments on it began to rattle.

"I don't know," she said; "don't let 'em see you; you couldn't do anything against so many. They are a band sworn to protect one another."

"His friends?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Ah, I see." He glanced at the two doors, one opening into the hall, the other into his room, and then he swayed and clutched the curtain.

She caught his arm and braced him up. "Oh, you *must* go lie down; you'll—"

A noise outside drew her back to the window. The band was crossing the street to the jail.

"What are they going to do?" He steadied himself, resting his hand on her shoulder, and looked through a pane above her head.

"To take Toot out."

"An' then he'll lead them, won't he?"

"I don't know! I reckon so—oh, I can't tell!" She faced him for an instant, a look of helpless indecision in her eyes; then she turned again to the window.

"I'll go slip on my coat," he said. "I—I'm cold. I'd better get ready. You see, he may want to—call me out. I wish I had a gun—or something."

She made no answer, and he went into his room. He turned up the lamp, but quickly lowered it again. He found his coat on a chair and put it on. He wondered if he were actually afraid. Surely he had never felt so before; perhaps his mind was not right—his wound and all his mental trouble had affected his nerves, and then a genuine thrill of horror went over him. Might not this be the particular form of punishment Providence had singled out for the murderer of Sally Dawson—might it not be the grewsome, belated answer to her mother's prayer?

Just then Harriet entered the room softly and turned his light down still lower.

"Stay back here," she said, her tone almost a command.

"Why?"

"If they get Toot out, it would be just like him to try to— You—you are not strong enough to get out of their way. Oh, I don't know what to do!" She went back to the window in the next room. He followed her, and stood by her side.

The white figures had dismounted at the jail. They paused at the gate a moment, then filed into the yard and stood at the door. The leader rapped on it loudly.

"Hello in thar, Tarpley Brown, show yore-se'f!" he cried.

There was a silence for a moment. In the moonlight the body of men looked like a snow-drift against the jail. The same voice spoke again:

"Don't you keep us waitin' long, nuther, Tarp. You kin know what sort we are by our grave-clothes ef you'll take the trouble to peep out o' the winder."

"What do you-uns want?" It was the quavering voice of the jailer, from the wing of the house occupied by him and his family.

His voice roused a sleeping infant, and it began to cry. The cry was smothered by some one's hand over the child's mouth.

"You know what we-uns want," answered the leader. "We come after Toot Wambush; turn 'im out, ef you know what's good fer you."

"Gentlemen, I'm a sworn officer of the law, I—"

"Drap that! Open that cell door, ur we'll put daylight through you."

This was followed by the low, pleading voice of the jailer's wife, begging her husband to comply with the demand, and the wailing of two or three children.

"Wait, then!" yielded the jailer. Westerfelt heard a door slam and chains clank and rattle on the wooden floor; a bolt was slid back, the front door opened, and the white drift parted to receive a dark form.

"Whar's my hoss?" doggedly asked Toot Wambush.

"Out thar hitched to the fence," answered the leader.

"You-uns was a hell of a time comin'," retorted Wambush.

"Had to git together; most uv us never even heerd uv yore capture tell a hour by sun.

Huh, you'd better thank yore stars we re'ched you when we did."

The band filed out of the gate and mounted their horses. Toot Wambush was a little in advance of the others. He suddenly turned his horse towards the hotel.

Westerfelt instinctively drew back behind the curtain. Harriet caught his arm and clung to it.

"Go to your room!" she whispered. "You'd better; you must not stay here." He seemed not to hear; he leaned forward and peered again through the window. The leader and Wambush had just reined their horses in at the edge of the sidewalk.

"Come on, Toot; whar you gwine?" asked the leader.

"I want to take that feller with us; I'll never budge 'thout him, you kin bet your bottom dollar on that."

"He's bad hurt—'bout ter die; don't be a fool!"

"Huh! Doc Lash sent me word he was safe. I didn't hurt 'im; but he did me; he damaged my feelings, and I want to pay 'im fer it. Are you fellers goin' back on me?"

"Not this chicken," a voice muttered, and a white form whipped his horse over to Wam-

bush's. "I'm with you," said another. Then there was a clamor of voices, and all the gang gathered round Wambush. He chuckled and swore softly. "That's the stuff!" he said. "Them's Cohutta men a-talkin'; you kin bet yore sweet life."

Harriet turned to Westerfelt. "They are drinking," she said. "Haven't you got a pistol?"

"No."

"You stay here then; don't let them see you; I'm going up-stairs and speak to Toot from the veranda. It's the only chance. Sh!"

She did not wait for a reply, but opened the door noiselessly and went out into the hall. He heard the rustle of her skirts as she went up the stairs. A moment later the door leading to the veranda on the floor above opened with a creak, and she appeared over the heads of the band.

"Toot! Toot Wambush!" she called out in a clear, steady voice. "I want to speak to you!"

Wambush, in a spirit of bravado, had just ridden on to the veranda, and could hear nothing above the thunderous clatter of his horse's hoofs on the floor.

"Here, thar, you jail-bird, yore wanted!" cried out the leader. "Stop that infernal racket!"

"What is it?" asked Wambush, riding back among his fellows.

"Toot Wambush!" Harriet repeated.

He looked up at her. "What do you want?" he asked, doggedly, after gazing up at her steadily for a moment.

"Get away as fast as you can," she replied. "His wound has broke again. He's bleeding to death!"

"Well, that's certainly good news!" Wambush did not move.

"You'd better go," she urged. "It will be wilful murder. You made the attack. He was unarmed, and you used a pistol and a knife. Do you want to be hung?"

He sat on his horse silent and motionless, his face upraised in the full moonlight. There was no sound except the champing of bits, the creaking of saddles.

"Come on, Toot," urged the leader in a low tone. "You've settled yore man's hash; what more do you want? We've got you out o' jail, now let us put you whar you'll be safe from the law."

Wambush had not taken his eyes from the

girl. He now spoke as if his words were meant for her only.

"If I go," he said, "will you come? Will you follow me? You know I'm not a-goin' to leave 'thout you, Harriet."

It seemed to Westerfelt that she hesitated before speaking, and at that moment a realization of what she had become to him and what she doubtless was to Wambush came upon him with such stunning force that he forgot even his peril in contemplating what seemed almost as bad as death.

"This is no time nor place to speak of such things," he heard the girl say, finally. "Go this minute and save yourself while you can."

"Hold on, Harriet!" Wambush cried out, as she was moving away. Westerfelt could no longer see her, and then he heard her close the door and start down-stairs.

"Come on, Toot"—the leader whipped his horse up against that of Wambush.

Some of the others had already started away.

Toot did not move. He was still looking at the spot where Harriet Floyd had stood.

"It simply means the halter, you blamed fool!"

Wambush stared into the mask of the speaker, and then reluctantly rode away.

Chapter VIII

WHEN Harriet returned she found Westerfelt lying face downward on the floor. In his fall he had unconsciously clutched and torn down the curtain, and like a shroud it lay over him. She was trying to raise him, when the door opened and her mother appeared.

"What's the matter, Harriet?"

"He has fainted—I don't know, he may be dead. Look, mother!"

Mrs. Floyd raised Westerfelt's head and turned his face upward.

"No, he's still breathing." She opened his shirt hastily. "His wound has not broken; we must get him to bed again. How did he happen to be here?"

"He got up as soon as the Whitecaps came; I couldn't persuade him to go back."

"We must carry him to the bed," said Mrs. Floyd. As they started to raise him, Westerfelt opened his eyes, took a long breath, and sat up. Without a word he rose to his feet,

and between them was supported back to his bed.

"His feet are like ice," said Mrs. Floyd, as she tucked the blankets round him. "Why did you let him stand there?"

"It wasn't her fault, Mrs. Floyd," explained Westerfelt, with chattering teeth. "I knew they meant trouble, and thought I ought to be ready."

"You ought to have stayed in bed." Her eyes followed Harriet to the fireplace. "No, daughter," she said, "go lie down; I'll stay here."

"I'd rather neither of you would sit up on my account," protested Westerfelt; "I'm all right; I'll sleep like a log till breakfast. I don't want to be such a bother."

"You ain't a bit of trouble," replied Mrs. Floyd, in a tone that was almost tender. "We are only glad to be able to help. When I saw that cowardly scamp draw his pistol and knife on you, I could 'a' killed him. I've often told Harriet—"

"Mother, Mr. Westerfelt doesn't care to hear anything about him." Harriet turned from the fire and abruptly left the room. Mrs. Floyd did not finish what she had started to say. Westerfelt looked at her question-

ingly and then closed his eyes. She went to the fireplace and laid a stick of wood across the andirons, and then sat down and hooded her head with a shawl.

When Westerfelt awoke it was early dawn. The outlines of the room and the different objects in it were indistinct. At the foot of his bed he noticed something which resembled a heap of clothing on a chair. He looked at it steadily, wondering if it could be part of the strange dreams which had beset him in sleep. As the room gradually became lighter, he saw that it was a woman. Mrs. Floyd, he thought—but no, the figure was slighter. It was Harriet. She had taken her mother's place just before daybreak. Her head hung down, but she was not asleep. Presently she looked up, and catching his eyes, rose and came to him.

"How do you feel now?" She touched his forehead with her soft, cool hand.

"I'm all right; I'll be up to breakfast."

"No, you won't; you must not; it would kill you."

"Pshaw! That pin-scratch?" He playfully struck his breast near the wound. "He'd have to cut deeper and rip wider to do me up."

She stifled a cry and caught his hand.

"You must not be so foolish." She started to turn away, but his fingers closed over hers.

"I'm sorry. I'll mind what you say, because you've been so good to me. It seems mighty queer — Toot Wambush's girl takin' care of the very man he tried to wipe off of the face of creation. No wonder he—"

She twisted her hand from his clasp. "Why do you say *I'm his girl?*"

"Because they all do, I reckon; ain't you? Last night I heard him ask you to follow him."

"You never heard me say I would, did you?"

"No, but—"

"Well, then!" She went to the fireplace. He could not see her, but heard her stirring the fire with a poker, and wondered if her movement was that of anger or agitation. For several minutes neither of them spoke; then she came to him suddenly.

"I forgot," she said; "here's a newspaper and a letter. Will Washburn left them for you." She gave them to him and went to the window and raised the shade, flooding the room with the soft yellowing light from the east. Then she resumed her seat at the fire.

He opened his letter. The handwriting was very crude, and he did not remember

having seen it before. Looking at the bottom of the last page, he saw that it was signed by Sue Dawson — Sally Dawson's mother. It was not dated, and began without heading of any kind. It ran thus:

"So you left this place fur new pastures. But I Will be sworn you went off cause you could not see the sun ashinin on my Childs grave nor meet her old broke down mother face to face. I have wanted to meet you ever since she died, but I helt in. The reason I sent you word not to come to the Funeral was cause I knowed ef I saw you thar I would jump right up before the people and drag you with yore yaller Pumpkin face full of gilt right up to her Box an make you look at yore work. It was not out of respect fur yore feelings that I did not, nuther, fur I dont respect you as much as I do a decent egg-suckin dog, but I was afraid folks would suspicion the pore Child's secret, the secret that me an you an nobody else knows, that she took her own life to git out of the misery you put her in. She did not want them to know, an they shall not; besides, thar are Folks in this cussed Settlement mean enough to begrudge her the grave Lot she has becase of what she was driv to.

"Thar is one thing I want you to stop. I dont want you to hire Peter Slogan with Blood money, nur nobody else, to haul wood fur me. I knowed you did send a load, fur he is too lazy to think of anybody but hisself without thar was money in it. I accused him of it after I had toted the last Stick back to yore land whar he got it. He tried to deny it, but I saw the lie in his face an shamed it. Dont you bother about me. I will live a powerful sight longer than you want me to before I am through with You. You will never forgit how Sally died, ef you did not look at her pore little face in death nur help the neighbors fill her grave up.

"John Westerfelt, you killed my Child as deliberately as ef you had choked the life out of her with yore Bare hands. You hung after her night and Day, even after she had been cautioned that you was fickle, an then when you got her whole soul an hart you deliberately left her an begun flyin around Liz Lithicum. I know yore sort. It is the runnin after a thing that amuses you, an as soon as you get it you turn agin it an spurn it under foot an laugh at it when it strugles in pain. Lawsy me, God Almighty dont inflict good men with that Disease, but you will have it nawin at yore Hart tel you run across some huzzy that will rule you her way. Beware, John Westerfelt, you will want to marry before long; you are a lonely, selfish Man, an you will want a wife an childern to keep you company an make you forget yore evil ways, but it is my constant prayer that you will never git one that loves you. I am prayin for that very thing and I believe it will come. John Westerfelt, I am yore Enemy—I am that ef it drags me into the Scorchin flames of hell.

"SUE DAWSON."

He refolded the letter, put it with quivering fingers back into its envelope, and then opened the newspaper and held it before his eyes. There was a clatter of dishes and pans in the back part of the house. A negro woman was out in the wood-yard, picking up chips and singing a low camp-meeting hymn. Now and then some one would tramp over the resounding floor, through the hall to the dining-room.

Harriet went to the door and closed it. Then she turned to him. The paper had slipped from his fingers and lay across his breast.

"What shall I get for your breakfast?" she asked. She moved round on the other side of the bed, wondering if it was the yellow morning light or his physical weakness that gave his face such a depressed, ghastly look.

"What did you say?" He stared at her absently.

"What would you like for breakfast?"

He looked towards his coat that hung on the foot of his bed.

"Don't bother about me; I'm going to get up."

"No, you must not." She caught his wrist. "Look how you are quivering; you ought not to have tried to read."

He raised the paper again, but it shook so that its rustling might have been heard across the room. She took it from him, and laid it on a chair by the bed. She looked away; the corners of his mouth were drawn down piteously and his lips were twitching.

"Please hand me my coat," he said.

"You are not going to get up?" She sat down on the bed and put her hand on his brow. Her face was soft and pleading. It held a sweetness, a womanly strength he longed to lean upon.

He caught her hand and held it nervously.

"I don't believe I've got a single friend on earth," he said. "I don't deserve any; I'm a bad man."

"Don't talk that way," she replied. There was something in his plaintive tone that seemed to touch her deeply, for she took his hand in both of hers and pressed it.

"I don't want to die, for your sake," he said, "for if I was to go under, it would be awkward for your—your friend. He might really have to swing for it."

She released his hand suddenly, a pained look in her face. "Did you want to put your letter in your coat pocket?" she asked.

"Yes."

She took the coat from a chair, gave it to him, and then went back to the fireplace. He thrust his hand into the pocket and took out Sally Dawson's last letter, and put it and her mother's into the same envelope. As he was putting them away he found in the same pocket a folded sheet of paper. He opened it. It was a letter from John Wambush to his son Toot. Then Westerfelt remembered the paper Harriet had picked up and given him in the street after the fight. Hardly knowing why he did so, he read it. It was as follows:

"DEAR TOOT,—Me an yore mother is miserable about you. We have prayed for yore reform day and night, but the Lord

seems to have turned a deef ear to our petitions. We hardly ever see you now an we are afraid you are goin to git into serious trouble. We want you to give up moonshinin, quit drinkin an settle down. We both think if you would jest git you a good wife you would act better. I wish you would go an marry that girl at the hotel—you know who I mean. I am as sorry for her as I ever was for anybody, for she dont think you love her much. She told me all about it the night the revenue men give you sech a close shave. I was standin on the hotel porch when you driv the wagon up with the whiskey barrel on it an I heerd them a-lopin along the road after you. I thought it was all up with you for I knowed they could go faster than you. Then I seed her run out on the back porch an help you roll the whiskey in the kitchen an close the door. An when the officers com up you was a-settin on the empty wagon talkin to her as if nothin had happened. I heard all the lies she told em about seein another wagon go whizzin down the road an I thought it was a great pity for her to do it, but she was doin it for a man she loved an I wouldent hold that agin her. A woman that loves as hard as she does would do a sight wuss than that if it was necessary. After you loaded the whiskey back on the wagon and got away to the woods, I went round an told her what I had seed an she bust out cryin an throwed her arms round my neck an said she loved you better than she did her own life an that she never would love any other man as long as breeth was in her body. Son, that night she come as nigh beggin me to git you to marry her as a proud girl could, an when I left I promised her I would talk to you about it. She's a good girl, Toot, and it would make a man of you to marry her. I like her mighty well an so does yore mother. Please do come out home soon. It looks like a pity for you to be away so much when it worries yore ma like it does.

"Yore affectionate father,

"JOHN WAMBUSH."

Westerfelt folded the letter deliberately, and then in a sudden spasm of jealous despair he crumpled it in his hand. He turned his head on the side and pressed down his pillow that he might see Harriet as she sat by the fire. The red firelight shone in her face. She looked tired and troubled.

"Poor girl!" he murmured. "Poor girl! Oh, God, have mercy on me! She loves him—she loves him!"

She looked up and caught his eyes. "Did you want anything?" she asked.

He gave the letter to her. "Burn it, please. I wish I had not read it."

She took it to the fire. The light of the blazing paper flashed on the walls, and then went out.

He remained so silent that she thought he was sleeping, but when she rose to leave the room she caught his glance, so full of dumb misery that her heart sank. She went to her mother in the kitchen. Mrs. Floyd was polishing a pile of knives and forks, and did not look up until Harriet spoke.

"Mother," she said, "I am afraid something has gone wrong with Mr. Westerfelt."

"What do you mean?" asked the old lady in alarm.

"I don't know, but he got a letter this morning, and after he read it he seemed changed and out of heart. He gave it to me to burn, and I never saw such a desperate look on a human face. I know it was the letter, because before he read it he was so — so different."

"Well," said Mrs. Floyd, "it may be only some business matter that's troubling him. Men have all sorts of things to worry about. As for me, I've made a discovery, Harriet, at least I think I have."

"Why, mother!"

Mrs. Floyd put the knives and forks into the knife-box.

"Hettie Fergusson was here just now," she said.

"This early!" exclaimed Harriet, incredulously. "Why, mother, where did she spend the night?"

"At home; that's the curious part about it; she has walked all that three miles since daylight, if she didn't get up before and start through the dark. I never could understand that girl. All the time she was working here she puzzled me. She was so absent-minded, and would jump and scream almost when the door would open. I am glad we

didn't need her help any longer. Sometimes I wish she had never come to the hotel."

Harriet stared wonderingly at her mother; then she said:

"Did she want to help us again?"

Mrs. Floyd laughed significantly.

"That's what she pretended she wanted, but she didn't have no more idea of working here than I have of flying through the air at this minute. Harriet, she is dead crazy in love with Toot Wambush. That is the truth about it."

"Why, mother, I can't believe it!" cried Harriet, her brow wrinkling in perplexity. "He hardly ever went with her or talked to her."

"He took her out home with him in a buggy six or seven times to my knowledge," declared Mrs. Floyd, "and there's no telling how often he saw her at home. He is awfully thick with her father. I never was fooled in a woman; she is in love with him, and right now she is worried to death about him. She couldn't hide her anxiety, and asked a good many round-about questions about where he was gone to, and if we knew whether the sheriff was hunting for him now, and if we thought Mr. Westerfelt would prosecute him."

Harriet laughed. "Well, I never dreamt there was a thing between those two. When he asked her to go with him in his buggy out home, I thought it was because she lived on the road to his father's, and that he just did it to accommodate her, and—"

"Oh, I've no doubt that is what *he* did it for, darling, but she was falling in love with him all the time, and now that he is in trouble, she can't hide it. Do you know her conduct this morning has set me to thinking? The night you and I spent over at Joe Long's I heard Wambush came very near being arrested with a barrel of whiskey he was taking to town, and that he managed to throw the officers off his track while he was talking to Hettie in our back yard. Do you know it ain't a bit unlikely that she helped him play that trick somehow? They say he was laughing down at the store after that about how he gave them the slip. I'll bet she helped him."

"If she is in love with him she did, I reckon," returned Harriet, wisely. "I wish he was in love with her. He is getting entirely too troublesome."

"He'll never care a snap for her as long as you are alive," retorted the old lady. "I'm sorry now that I ever let you go with him

so much. He seems to be getting more and more determined to make you marry him whether or no. He is jealous of Mr. Westerfelt." Mrs. Floyd lowered her voice. "If he hadn't been, he wouldn't have fought him as he did. That is at the bottom of it, daughter, and now that he is a regular outlaw I am awfully uneasy. If I ever get a chance, I'm going to convince him that it is useless for him to worry you as he does. I'd rather see you in your grave than married to a man like that."

Chapter IX

IT was a week before John Westerfelt was strong enough to leave his room in the hotel. Inflammation of his wound had set in, and at one time his condition was thought to be quite critical.

One day Luke Bradley came in his buggy to drive him out to his house.

"Marthy won't heer to a refusal," he said. "She's powerful' troubled. She 'lowed ef we'd 'a' made you stay with us you'd not 'a' been apt to 'a' met Wambush that day, an' 'a' been laid up like this. She's jest dyin' to git to cook things fer you an' doctor you up."

"I'll go and stay a day, anyway," promised Westerfelt. He glanced at Harriet Floyd, who stood behind the curtains looking out of the window. "I don't need any finer treatment than I've had, Luke. Miss Harriet's been better than a sister to me. She saved my life the other night, too. If she hadn't interfered that gang would have nabbed me

as sure as preaching, and I was unarmed and too weak to stand rough handling."

Harriet came from the window. She took the roll of blankets that Bradley had brought and held one of them before the fire.

"It's chilly out to-day," she said. "You'd better wrap him up well, Mr. Bradley."

Bradley did not reply. He heard a noise outside, and went out hastily to see if his horse was standing where he had left him. Westerfelt dragged himself from his chair and stood in front of the fire. He had grown thinner during his confinement, and his clothes hung loosely on him.

"You *have* been good to me," he repeated, in a low tone, "and I wish I could do something to pay you back." She said nothing. She bent over and felt the blanket to see if it were scorching, and then turned the other side to the fire.

"Mrs. Bradley is a fine nurse," she said, presently. "She'll take good care of you. Besides, she has a better claim on you than we—mother and I—have; she has known you longer."

"I'll tell you the truth," he answered, after studying her face for a moment in silence. "I'd really be willing to get hurt over again

for an excuse to live here like I have. I am the loneliest man that was ever born—lonely is no name for it. In the dead hours of the night I suffer agonies—you see, I am not a good sleeper. I have been as near insanity as any man that ever lived out of an asylum. But I have been mighty nearly free from all that since you began to nurse me. I wish to God it could go on forever—forever, do you understand?—but it can't—it can't. I have my troubles and you have yours—that is," he added, quickly, as she shot a sudden glance of inquiry at him, "I reckon you have troubles, most girls do."

"Yes, I have my troubles, Mr. Westerfelt," she said, simply. "Sometimes I think I cannot bear mine, but I do."

He said nothing, but his eyes were upon her almost with a look of fear. Was she about to tell him frankly of her love for Wambush?

She rolled up one of the blankets and put it on the rug in front of the fire, and held up another to be warmed. He thought he had never seen a face so full of sweet, suffering tenderness. His heart bounded suddenly with a thought so full of joy that he could hardly breathe. She had driven the outlaw from her

heart and already loved him; she had learned to love him since he had been there. He could see it, feel it in her every tender word and act, and he—God knew he loved her—loved her with his whole wearied soul. Then the thought of her appeal to old John Wambush and the lies she had told that night to save her lover struck him like a blow in the face, and he felt himself turning cold all over in the embrace of utter despair. "No, no, no!" he said, in his heart, "she's not for me! I could never forget that—never! I've always felt that the woman I loved must never have loved before, and Wambush—ugh!"

She raised her great eyes to his in the mellow firelight, and then, as if puzzled by his expression, calmly studied his face.

"You are not going back to that room over the stable, are you?" she questioned.

"Yes, to-morrow night."

"Don't do it—it is not comfortable; it is awfully roomy and bare and cold."

"Oh, I am used to that. Many a time I've slept out in the open air on a frosty night, with nothing round me but a blanket."

"You could occupy this room whenever it suited you; it is seldom used. I heard mother say yesterday that she wished you would."

"I'd better stay there," he answered, moved again by her irresistible solicitude, and that other thing in her tone to which he had laid claim and hugged to his bruised heart. He felt an almost uncontrollable desire to raise her in his arms, to unbosom his anguish to her, and propose that they both fight their battles of forgetfulness side by side, but he shrank from it. The thought of Wambush was again upon him like some rasping soul-irritant.

"No, no; I'm going back to the stable," he said, fiercely. "I will not stay here any longer—not a day longer!"

He saw her start, and then she put down the blanket and stood up. "I do not understand you at all, sometimes," she faltered, "not at all."

"But I understand you, God knows," he returned, bitterly. "Harriet, little, suffering, wronged woman, I know something about you. I know what has been worrying you so much since I came here."

She started and an awful look crept into her face.

"Oh, Mr. Westerfelt, do you?"

"Yes, I know it—that's enough now; let's agree never again to speak of it. I don't

want to talk about it, and I reckon you don't. Anyway, it can't be helped."

"No, it can't be helped." Her lips began to twitch and quiver, and her eyes went down.

"I understand it all now," she added. "And I don't blame you. I told mother yesterday that I thought you might suspect—"

"Your mother knows then?"

"Yes, of course," raising her eyes in surprise.

For a moment they were silent. Westerfelt leaned against the mantel-piece; he had never felt such utter despair. It was like being slowly tortured to death to hear her speaking so frankly of the thing which he had never been able to contemplate with calmness.

"So you see now that I'd better go back to the stable, don't you?" he asked, gloomily.

"I suppose so," she said. "I suppose you mean that—" but she was unable to formulate what lay in her confused mind. Besides, Luke Bradley was coming in. They heard his heavy tread on the veranda.

"Well, come on, John, ef you are ready," he called out. "That blamed nag o' mine won't stand still a minute."

When Westerfelt had been driven away,

and Harriet had watched him out of sight down the road, she came back to the fire and sat down in the chair Westerfelt had used during his convalescence. She kept her eyes fixed on the coals till her mother entered the room.

"I reckon he thought funny that I didn't come in to tell him good-bye," she said, with a knowing little laugh; "but I'll be bound he was glad I didn't. Even Mr. Bradley had the good sense to go outside."

"Mother, what are you talking about?"

"You know mighty well what I mean," returned Mrs. Floyd, with a smile. "I know Mr. Westerfelt is dead in love with you, and goodness knows you couldn't fool me about how you feel if you tried. I was a girl once."

"Mother," said Harriet, "I never want you to mention him to me again," and she put her hands over her face and began to cry softly.

"Why, what *is* the matter, dear?" the old woman sat down near her daughter, now alarmed by her conduct. Harriet stared her mother in the face. "He knows all about it, mother—he knows I am not your child, that nobody knows where I came from. Oh, mother, I can't stand it—I simply cannot. I wanted him to know, and yet when he told me he knew, it nearly killed me."

Mrs. Floyd turned pale. "There must be some mistake," she said; "no one here knows it—and only one or two up in Tennessee."

"There is no mistake," sighed the girl. "He told me the other day that he had relatives in Tennessee. Oh, mother, more people know it than you think. I have always felt that they knew. So many have noticed that you and I do not look alike."

Mrs. Floyd's eyes were moist and her face was wrung with sympathy. She put her arms around the girl and drew her to her breast. "I ought never to have told you," she said; "but the lawyers knew it, and when your papa's estate was wound up it had to be told to a few. I thought you would soon forget it, but you have never stopped thinking about it. You are entirely too sensitive, too—"

"Mother, you don't know anything about it," said Harriet. "When you told me I was not your child I actually prayed to die. It has been the only real trouble I ever had. I never see poor, worthless people without thinking that I may be closely related to them, and since Mr. Westerfelt has been here and told me about his aristocratic relatives and his old family, I have been more unhappy than ever.

I was going to tell him some day, but he saved me the trouble."

"I can't imagine how he knew it," gave in Mrs. Floyd, thoughtfully. "Perhaps he has had some dealings with our lawyers, though they promised not to speak of it. I thought when we moved down here among strangers you'd quit troubling about that. You know you are as good as anybody else, so what is the good of worrying? You make me very unhappy, Harriet. I feel almost as if I did wrong to bring you up. But you know I love you just the same as if you was my own child, don't you?"

"Yes, and I love you as if you were my own mother. I love you more, too, when I am in trouble, though I reckon I don't show it; but, mother, I am dying to know something about my own flesh and blood. I'd rather know that my blood was good than have all the wealth of the earth. You have let enough out to show me that I must have had very, very poor parents."

"I simply said that when they left you at my house you had on rather cheap clothing, but you know that was just after the war, when nobody could dress their children much."

"But they deserted me," said Harriet:

"they could not have been very honorable. I reckon Mr. Westerfelt knows all about it."

"Well, he won't think any the less of you if he does," said Mrs. Floyd. "He looks like a born gentleman to me. You will never see a man like him turning against a girl for something she can't help. You ought not to say your parents were not honorable; they may have left you, thinking it would be best for you. We were considered pretty well off then."

Harriet made no reply for several minutes, and then she said:

"I think Mr. Westerfelt is the best man I ever knew, but he must be like his father some, and he told me that his father, who was a captain in the army, refused to ever see his daughter again who married the son of his overseer. She moved to Texas, and died out there. Mother, the legitimate daughter of an overseer would stand higher in any Southern community than—" At this point a sob broke in her voice, and the girl could go no further. Mrs. Floyd rose and kissed her on the cheek. "I see," she said, "that as long as you keep talking about this you will search and search for something to worry about. I'm glad Mr. Westerfelt knows about it, though, for he would have to be told some

day, and now he knows what to count on. I'll bet you anything he keeps on loving you, and—"

"Oh, mother," broke in Harriet, "I don't think he lo—cares that much for me; I really do not."

Chapter X

"By George!" exclaimed Bradley, as they drove away, "you certainly lit on your feet when you struck that house. It looks like it 'ud pay you to git stabbed every day in the week; it's paid the community, the Lord knows, fer it is shet of the biggest dare-devil that wus ever in it. The ol' lady seems to have about as bad a case on you as the gal. I've been thar a time or two to ax about you, an' I never seed the like o' stirrin' round fixin' things they 'lowed would suit yore taste."

"They have been mighty good to me, indeed," answered the young man, simply. "I don't think I could have had such thoughtful attention, even at home."

"I don't like fer anything to puzzle me," said Luke, with a little laugh, "an' I'll swear Miss Harriet's a riddle. I would a-swore on the stand a week ago that she wus as big a fool about Wambush as a woman kin git to be, but now—well, I reckon she's jest like the rest. Let the feller they keer fer git a black eye an'

have bad luck, an' they'll sidle up to the fust good-lookin' cuss they come across. A man that reads novels to git his marryin' knowledge frum is in pore business; besides the book hain't writ that could explain a woman unless it is the Great Book, an' it wouldn't fit no woman o' this day an' time."

"You think, then, Luke," said Westerfelt, "that a good woman—a real good woman—could love twice in—in a short space of time?"

"Gewhillikins! What a question; they kin love a hundred times before you kin say Jack Robinson with yore mouth open. When you git married, John, you must make up your mind that yo're marryin' fer some'n else besides dern foolishness. The Bible says the prime intention of the business wus to increase an' multiply; ef you an' yore wife ever git to multiplyin', you an' her won't find much time to suck thumbs an' talk love an' pick flowers an' press 'em in books an' the like. Folks may say what they damn please about women lovin' the most; it's the feller mighty nigh ever' whack that acts the fool. I was plumb crazy about Marthy, an' used to be afeerd she wus so fur gone on me that she wouldn't take a sufficient supply o' victuals to keep up 'er strength. That wus when I was courtin' of 'er an' losin'

sleep, an' one thing or other. After we wus married, though, me an' 'er mother come to words one day about a shoat pig she claimed had her mark on its yeer an' was penned up with mine, an' she up an' told me out o' spite that the very night before me 'n' Marthy got married, Ward Billingsley wus thar at the house tryin' to get 'er to run off with him, an' that Marthy come as nigh as pease a-doin' of it. Her maw said she'd a-gone as shore as preachin' ef she'd a-had a dress fitten to take the trip on the train in. I reckon it wus every word the truth, fer to this day Marthy won't deny it; but it don't make a bit of difference to me now. Marthy would a-done as well by Ward as she did by me, I reckon. When women once git married they come down to hard-pan like a kickin' mule when it gits broke to traces."

Westerfelt drew the blankets closer about him. The road had taken a sharp turn round the side of a little hill, and the breeze from the wide reach of level valley lands was keen and piercing. Bradley's volubility jarred on him. It brought an obnoxious person back, and roughly, into the warm memory of Harriet Floyd's presence, and gentle, selfless tenderness. He ground his teeth in agony. He had just been debating in his mind the possi-

bility of his being, in consideration of his own mistakes, able to take the girl, in her new love, into his heart and hold her there forever, but if she loved Wambush, as, of course, she once did, might she not later love some other man—or might she not even think—remember—Wambush?

"Great God!" He uttered the words aloud, and Bradley turned upon him in surprise.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Westerfelt; "my wound twinged just a little, that is all."

"I was driving too fast over these rocks anyway," said Bradley, solicitously.

The horse stopped at a clear mountain stream that leaped in a succession of waterfalls down the sheer hill-side into the valley. Bradley got out to loosen the bridle to allow the animal to drink, and stood with one foot on the shore and the other on a brown stone in the water. Try as he would, Westerfelt could not banish Harriet from his mind. Her sweet personality seemed to be trying to defend itself against the unworthy thoughts which fought for supremacy in his mind. He thought of her wonderful care of him in his illness; her unfailing tenderness and sympathy when he was suffering; her tears—yes, he was

sure he had detected tears in her eyes one day when the doctor was giving him unusual pain in dressing his wound. Ah, how sweet that was to remember! and yet the same creature had loved a man no higher than Wambush; had even sobbed out a confession of her love in the arms of his father. Such was the woman, but he loved her with the first real love of his life.

The next day but one, Westerfelt, feeling sufficiently strong, was driven by Washburn down to the livery-stable, where he sat in the warm sunshine against the side of the house. While sitting there watching the roads which led down to the village from the mountains, he was surprised to see Peter Slogan ride up on his bony bay horse and alight.

"Howdy' do, John?" he said. "I wus jest passin' on my way home an' thought I'd halt an' ax about that cut o' yore'n."

"Oh, I'm doing pretty well, Peter," answered Westerfelt, as he extended his hand without rising. "But I didn't know that you ever got this far from home."

"Hain't once before, since I went to fight the Yanks," grinned Slogan. "Seems to me I've rid four hundred an' forty-two miles on that churndasher thar. My legs is one solid

sore streak from my heels up, an' now it's beginnin' to attact my spine-bone. I'm too ol' an' stiff to bear down right in the stirrups, I reckon."

"What has brought you over here?" asked Westerfelt, with a smile.

Slogan took out his clay pipe with its cane stem and knocked it on the heel of his boot, then he put it into his mouth and blew through it till the liquid nicotine cracked audibly. "I've been huntin'," he said, dryly. "In my day an' time I've been on all sorts o' hunts, from bear an' deer down to yaller-hammers, but I waited till I wus in my sixty-fifth year—goin' on sixty-six—'fore I started out huntin' fer a dad-blasted woman."

"A woman!" exclaimed the listener.

"You could guess who it wus ef you'd make a stab ur two at it," Slogan made answer, as he scratched a match and began to smoke. "Day before yesterday Clariss' went out in the yard to rake up a apron o' chips, an' happened to take notice that thar wusn't a sign o' smoke comin' out o' the old woman's chimney. It was cold enough to freeze hard boiled eggs, an' she 'lowed some'n had gone wrong down at the cabin, so she run in whar I wus, skeerd into kinniptions. 'Mr. Slogan,' sez she,

'I believe sister's friz in 'er bed, ur dropped off sudden, fer as shore as yore a-smokin' in that cheer, thar ain't a speck o' fire in 'er chimney.' Well, I wus in my stockin' feet, like I ginerally am when I want to take it easy before a fire on a cold day, an' I slid my feet into my shoes as quick as I could an' went out an' took a look. Shore enough, thar wusn't a bit o' smoke about the cabin. So I tol' Clariss' to run down an' see what wus wrong, but she wouldn't budge out o' her tracks. You see, she ain't never felt right about the way she used to do the old woman, an' I reckon she wus afeerd her dead body would do a sight more accusin'—I dunno, she wouldn't go a step fer some reason ur other, but she stood thar twistin' 'er hands an' cryin' an' beggin' me to do her duty. I tol' 'er the last time I wus thar the ol' huzzy wouldn't so much as notice me, an' that I'd had 'nough trouble lookin' atter my own pore kin without galivantin' about atter my kin by a' unfortunate marriage, but nothin' would do 'er but fer me to go, so I did, an' found the old woman had run clean off. Well, when I told Clariss' that, she mighty nigh had a fit. She swore she had driv her sister desperate by her conduct in the past an' that 'er body

would be found as stiff as a bar o' iron in the woods some'rs whar she wus tryin' to keep warm. So the long an' short of it wus that me 'n' my hoss had to start out."

"And you have found her?" asked the young man, now thoroughly concerned.

"You bet I did, after scourin' the entire face of creation. I traced 'er frum one old acquaintance to another, till last night I run up on 'er over at Bill Wyman's, ten miles down the valley. It was ten o'clock when I got thar, an' as cold as a cake o' ice in the small o' yore back. I called Bill out in his shift on the porch. I was mighty nigh friz, an' I reckon he soon got that away, fer he kept dancin' about fust on one foot an' then on another, while we talked. He admitted she wus thar, but he wouldn't let me stay all night, although I offered to plank down the usual price fer man an' beast. She'd been talkin' to him, I could see that, fer he up an' said some'n about folks bein' churched in his settlement fer the mistreatment o' widows, but he'd admit, he said, that he wusn't posted on the manners an' customs uv all the places over beyant the mount'in; he reckoned the nigher people got to the railroad the furder they wus from the cross. I tried to reason with 'im, but he

said ef I wanted to argue my case, I'd better come round in the summer.

"Thar wusn't any other house nigher'n six miles, an' so I made me a fire in a little cove by the road, an' set over it an' thought, mostly about women, all night. I've heerd preachers say a man oughtn't to think too much about women anyway, but I reckon I backslid last night, fer I thought hard about mighty nigh ever' woman I ever seed or heerd of."

"How has Mrs. Dawson been getting on since I left?" ventured Westerfelt.

"Just about as bad as she knowed how, I reckon, John. After you left, she seemed to take 'er spite out on Lizzie Lithicum. Liz never could pass anywhar nigh 'er without havin' the old cat laugh out loud at 'er. Liz has been goin' with that cock-eyed Joe Webb a good deal—you know he's jest about the porest ketch anywhars about, an' that seemed to tickle Mis' Dawson mightily. I reckon somebody told 'er some'n Liz said away back when you fust started to fly around 'er. I axed Clem Dill ef he knowed anything about it, an' Clem 'lowed Liz had kind o' made fun o' Sally about you gittin' tired uv 'er, an' one thing ur other. I dunno; I cayn't keep up with sech things. I jest try to find 'em out

once in awhile beca'se Clariss' is sech a hand to want to know. When she gits to rantin' about anythin' I've done—ur hain't done—all I got to do to shet 'er up is to start to tell 'er some'n somebody's has said about somebody else, an' she gits 'er cheer. So I try to keep a stock o' things on hand. Clem Dill's afeerd o' Mis' Dawson now. I was in the store one day about a week ago, an' she come in to swap a pair o' wool socks she had knit fer coffee, an' Clem 'lowed, jest to pass the time, while he wus at the scales, he'd ax 'er what ailed her an' Lizzie, anyway. But I reckon Clem has quit axin' fool questions, fer she turned on 'im like a tiger-cat. Sez she:

"'Liz Lithicum dared to say my child made a fool o' herse'f about John Westerfelt. That's exactly what Liz an' other folks sez about yore wife. I don't see what right you have to ax *me* sech a question.' Well, sir, Clem was so much set back 'at he couldn't hardly speak, an' he spilled a scoop o' coffee on the counter 'fore he could get it into the old woman's poke. After she had gone out, laughin' in her sneakin' way, Clem come back whar I wus at by the stove an' set down an' spit about two dozen times. Arter 'while he axed me ef I'd ever heerd the talk about his wife, an' I eased him all I could,

but, lawsy me, you ort ter see 'im hop up an' bow an' scrape when old Sue comes in the store now. Clem ain't a jealous man — I reckon he's been married too long for that. In my courtin' days I used to be jealous actually of Clariss's own daddy, but now I make a habit o' invitin' the preacher to our house every third Sunday so I kin git a decent meal an' set an' smoke in the kitchen. John, you don't seem to be any nigher marryin' now than you wus awhile back."

Westerfelt smiled, but made no reply.

"Well, you'd better keep on a-thinkin' it over," counselled Slogan, as he took the saddle and blanket from his horse and examined a rubbed spot on the animal's back; "thar's a heap more fun marryin' in a body's mind than before a preacher; the law don't allow a feller but one sort of a wife, but a single man kin live alone, an' fancy he's got any kind he wants, an' then she won't be eternally a-yellin' to 'im to fetch in fire-wood. A young feller kin make a woman a sight more perfect than the Creator ever did, an' He's had a sight o' practice. I reckon the Lord made 'em like they are to keep men humble and contrite an' to show up to advantage His best work on t'other shore. But so long, John, I must be goin'."

Chapter XI

It was a dark night two weeks later.

Westerfelt, quite recovered from his illness, was returning from a long ride through the mountains, where he had been in search of a horse that had strayed from the stable.

The road along the mountain-side was narrow and difficult to follow. At times he was obliged to ascend places so steep that he had to hold to the mane of his horse to keep from falling off.

At the foot of a mountain about two miles from Cartwright, he heard voices ahead of him. He stopped, peered through the foliage, and, a few paces farther on, saw a wagon containing a couple of barrels. Near it stood two men in slouched hats and jeans clothing.

"Thought shore I heerd some'n," said one of them.

"Which away?" asked the other.

"Sounded to me like a hoss up on the mount'in."

There was a silence for a moment, then the first voice said:

"No, not that away. Listen! It's somebody comin' up the road on foot. I reckon it's a friend, but I don't take no resks."

The two men stepped quickly to the wagon and took out a couple of rifles. Then they stood motionless behind the wagon and horse. Westerfelt heard the regular step of some one coming up the road.

"Hello thar!" cried one of the men at the wagon.

"Hello!" was the answer.

"Stand in yore tracks! What's the pass-word?"

"Joe Dill's good 'nough pass-word fer me; I don't try to keep up with all the pop-doodle you fellers git up."

"Joe Dill will do in this case, bein' as yore a good liquor customer. What'll you have, Joseph?"

"A gallon o' mash—this jug jest holds that amount up to the neck. Gi'me a swallow in a cup, I'm as dry as powder. What do you-uns mean by bein' in the business ef you cayn't send out a load oftener'n this? I'll start to 'stillin' myse'f. I know how the dang truck's

made; nothin' but corn-meal an' water left standin' till it rots, an'—"

"Revenue men's as thick through heer as flies in summer-time," broke in the man at the faucet. "Sh! what's that?"

Westerfelt's horse had stepped on a dry twig. There was silence for a moment, then Dill laughed softly.

"Nothin' but a acorn drappin'. You fellers is afeerd o' yore shadders; what does the gang mean by sendin' out sech white-livered chaps?" The only sound for a moment was the gurgling of the whiskey as it ran into the jug. "How's Toot like his isolation?" concluded Dill, grunting as he lifted the jug down from the wagon.

"It's made a wuss devil 'n ever out'n 'im," was the answer. "He don't do a blessed thing now but plot an' plan fer revenge. He's beginnin' to think that hotel gal's gone back on 'im an' tuk to likin' the feller he fit that day. My Lord, that man'll see the day he'll wish he'd never laid eyes on Wambush."

"I hain't in entire sympathy with Toot." It was Dill's voice. "That is to say, not entire!"

"Well, don't say so, ef you know what's good fer you."

"Oh, it's a free country, I reckon."

"Don't you believe it!"

"What's Toot gwine to do?"

"I don't know, but he'll hatch out some'n."

Westerfelt's horse had been standing on the side of a little slope, and the soft earth suddenly gave way beneath his hind feet, and in regaining a firm footing he made a considerable noise. There was nothing now for Westerfelt to do but to put a bold face on the matter.

"Get up," he said, guiding his horse down towards the men.

"Halt!" commanded one of the moonshiners. All three of them were now huddled behind the wagon.

"Hello!" answered Westerfelt, drawing rein; "I'm lookin' for an iron gray, flea-bitten horse that strayed away from the livery-stable this morning; have you fellows seen anything of him?"

"No, I hain't." This in a dogged tone from a slouched hat just above a whiskey barrel.

There was a pause.

"I don't think anybody could have taken him," continued Westerfelt, pleasantly.

"Hain't seed 'im." The speaker struck the wagon-bed with his rifle as he was trying to put it down behind the barrels without being seen.

"The left hand road leads to town, I believe?" said Westerfelt, riding away.

"Yes, but take the right at the next fork."

About half a mile farther on he saw two horsemen, approaching. When quite near they stopped.

"Howdy' do?" said one, eying Westerfelt suspiciously.

"How are you?" answered Westerfelt.

"We are revenue men; we're after a couple o' men and a wagon loaded with whiskey. Seen anything of them?"

Westerfelt was silent. The revenue officer who had spoken rested his elbow on his thigh and leaned towards him.

"Looky' here," he said, deliberately; "we don't know one another, but there may be no harm in tellin' you if you try to throw us off the track you lay yoreself liable to complicity. We've had about as much o' that sort o' treatment round heer as we are going to put up with."

"I'm not on the witness-stand," said Westerfelt, pleasantly; "I'm only looking for a stray horse."

"Let's go on," said the other officer to his companion. "We are on the right road;

he's seed 'em ur he'd a-denied it. Let's not lose time."

"I'm with you," was the reply; then to Westerfelt: "You are right, you hain't on the witness-stand, but ef we wanted to we could mighty easy arrest you on suspicion and march you back to jail to be questioned by the inspectors."

Westerfelt smiled. "You'd have to feed me at the expense of the government, and I'm as hungry as a bear; I've been out all day, and haven't had a bite since breakfast."

The revenue men laughed. "We know who you are," said the one that had spoken first, "an' we know our business, too; so long!"

Two hours later, as Westerfelt was about to go to bed in his room over the stable, he heard a voice calling down-stairs. He went to the window and looked out. Below he saw four men, two saddle horses, and a horse and wagon. He heard Washburn open the office door and ask:

"What do you folks want?"

"Want to put up our beasts an' this hoss an' wagon," was the reply. "We've got some gentlemen heer we're gwine to jail till mornin'."

"All right. I'll slide open the doors as soon as I git my shoes on. I wus in bed."

"We'll have to leave these barrels o' rot-gut with you."

"All right. Plenty o' room." Westerfelt came down-stairs just as Washburn opened the big doors.

"Hello!" said the revenue officer who had addressed him on the mountain; "you see we made quick time; we found 'em right whar you left 'em."

"I see."

Washburn, who was under the skirt of a saddle unbuckling a girth, glanced at Westerfelt in surprise as he lifted the saddle from the horse and carried it into the stable. The two moonshiners exchanged quick glances and sullenly muttered something to each other. Westerfelt, intent on getting the business over that he might go to bed, failed to observe these proceedings. When the officers had taken their prisoners on towards the jail, Washburn, who, with a lantern, was putting the horses into stalls, turned to Westerfelt.

"My Lord! Mr. Westerfelt," he said, "I hope you didn't give them fellers away."

"Never dreamt of such a thing. What do you mean?"

"I 'lowed you had by what that feller said just now."

"What did he say?"

"Why, he said they'd ketched the men right whar you left 'em, an'—"

"Well, what of that?" Westerfelt spoke impatiently. "I did pass the whiskey wagon. The revenue men asked me if I'd seen them, and I simply refused to answer. They didn't get anything out of me."

"That's just what I'd 'a' done, but I wish you'd 'a' set yorese'f right jest now, fer them fellers certainly think you give 'em away, an' they'll tell the gang about it."

"Well, I didn't, so what does it matter?"

Washburn took out the bowl of his lantern and extinguished the light as they entered the office.

"It makes a man mighty unpopular in the Cohutta Valley to interfere with the moonshiners," he answered. "Whiskey-makin' is agin the law, but many a family gits its livin' out o' the stuff, an' a few good citizens keep the'r eyes shet to it. You see, Mr. Westerfelt, the gang may be a little down on you anyway sence your difficulty with Wambush. Did you know that he wus a sort of a ring-leader amongst 'em?"

"Yes."

"Well, you mark my word, that feller'd swear his chances of heaven away to turn them mount'in men agin you."

"Most of them are good-hearted fellows," replied Westerfelt. "They won't harm me."

Washburn sat down on his bed, pulled off his shoes, and dropped them on the puncheon floor.

"But he's got the'r ear, an' you hain't, Mr. Westerfelt. He'd grab at a chance like this an' you'd never be able to disprove anything. Toot's got some unprincipled friends that 'ud go any length to help him in rascality."

The next morning before the revenue men had left with their prisoners and the confiscated whiskey for the town where the trial before an inspector was to take place, a number of mountaineers had gathered in the village. They stood about the streets in mysterious groups and spoke in undertones, and now and then a man would go to the jail window and confer with the prisoners through the bars. Several men had been summoned to attend the trial as witnesses, and others went out of curiosity or friendship for the accused.

That evening, as John Westerfelt was passing through the hall of the hotel to the dining-

room, he met Harriet Floyd. She started when she saw him, and he thought she acted as if she wanted to speak to him, but just then some other boarders entered, and she turned from him abruptly. She sat opposite him at the table a few moments later, but she did not look in his direction.

On his return to the stable after supper, Washburn gave him a letter. He recognized Sue Dawson's handwriting on the envelope.

"Is it a order?" asked Washburn, thinking it concerned the business.

"No, no; from a—a friend." Westerfelt lighted a candle at the wick of Washburn's lantern and went up to his room. He put the candle on a little table and sat down by it.

"I'll never read another line from that woman," he said. "I can't. She'll run me crazy! I've suffered enough."

He threw the letter unopened on the table, and clasped his hands over his knee and sat motionless for several minutes. Then he picked up the letter and held one corner of it in the candle-flame. It ignited, and the blue blaze began to spread over the envelope. Suddenly he blew it out and tore the letter open. The margin of the paper was charred, but the contents were intact. It ran:

"JOHN WESTERFELT,—I heard you Come Nigh meeting yore Death. The Lord let you live to make you Suffer. The worst pain is not in the body But in the Soul. You will likely live a long time and never git over yore guilty suffering. The Report has gone out that some gal over thar tuk care of you while you wus down in Bed. Well, it would be jest like you to try yore skill on her. God Help her. I dont know her, nor nothin about her, but she ort ter be warned. Ef she loved you with all Her soul you would pick a Flaw somehow. Mark my words. You will live to See Awful Shapes when nobody else does. Yore Hell Has begun. It will Go on for everlastin and everlastin.

"SUE DAWSON."

He put the letter into his pocket and went to the window and drew down the shade. Then he locked the door and placed the candle on the mantel-piece and stood an open book before it, so that his bed was in the shadow. He listened to hear if Washburn was moving below, then knelt by the bed and covered his face with his hands. He tried to pray, but could think of no words to express his desires. He had never been so sorely tried. Even if he could school himself to forgetting Harriet's old love and the act of deceitfulness into which her love had drawn her, could he ever escape Mrs. Dawson's persecutions? Would she not, even if he won and married Harriet, pursue and taunt him with the girl's old love, as she had Clem Dill? And how could he

stand that—he, whose ideal of woman and woman's constancy had always been so high?

He rose, sat on the edge of the bed, and clasped his hands between his knees. The room was in darkness except the spot of light on the wall behind the book. Below he heard the horses crunching their corn and hay. He took from his pocket Sue Dawson's letters and the one from Sally and wrapped them in a piece of paper. Then he looked about for a place to hide them. In a corner overhead he saw a jutting rafter, and behind it a dark niche where the shingles sloped to the wall. It was too high for him to reach from the floor, so he placed the table beneath the spot, and, mounting it, pushed the packet tightly into the corner. Then he stepped down and removed the table, cautiously, that Washburn might not hear him, and sat on the bed again. He remained there motionless for twenty minutes. Suddenly a rat ran across the floor with a scrap of paper in its mouth. He stared at the place where the rat had disappeared as if bewildered, then rose, placed the table back against the wall, secured the packet, and put it into his pocket.

Chapter XII

WESTERFELT knew he could not sleep, and, seeing the moonlight shining through his window, he decided to take a walk. He went below. Washburn sat in a little circle of candle-light mending a piece of harness.

"Has the hack come in yet?" asked Westerfelt, remembering that he had paid little attention to business that day.

"Yes," answered Washburn; "it's down at the store unloadin' the mail."

"I thought I heard it turn the corner. Any passengers?"

"No; Buck said a family, one woman and five children, wus ready to start by the Cohutta road to Royleston, but the report about the Whitecaps t'other night skeerd 'em out of it, so they went by train to Wilks, an' through that way. This outlawin' will ruin the country ef it hain't stopped; nobody'll want to settle heer."

"I'll be back soon," said Westerfelt, and he went out.

Westerfelt

The November air was dry and keen as he walked briskly towards the mountains. The road ran through groves of stunted persimmon and sassafras bushes, across swift-bounding mountain streams, and under natural arbors of wild grapes and muscadine vines. In a few minutes Westerfelt reached the meeting-house on a little rise near the roadside.

It had never been painted, but age and the weather had given it the usual grayish color. Behind it, enclosed by a rail fence, was the graveyard. The mounds had sunk, the stones leaned earthward, and the decaying trellises had been pulled down by the vines which clambered over them.

It was a strange thing for Westerfelt to do, but, seeing the door open, he went into the church. Two windows on each side let in the moonlight. The benches were unpainted, and many of them had no backs.

Westerfelt stood before the little pulpit for a moment and then turned away. Outside, the road gleamed in the moonlight as it stretched on to the village. A glimpse of the graveyard through the window made him shudder. It reminded him of a grave he had never seen save in his mind. It was past midnight.

He would go back to his bed, though he felt no inclination to sleep.

As he approached the stable, walking in the shadow of the trees on the side of the street, he saw a woman come out of the blacksmith's shop opposite the stable. For a moment she paused, her face raised towards the window of his room, and then retreated into the shop.

It was Harriet Floyd. He stepped behind a tree and watched the door of the shop. In a moment she reappeared and looked up towards his window again. He thought she might be waiting to see him, so he moved out into the moonlight and advanced towards her.

"Oh, it's you!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "I've been waiting to see you. I—I must tell you something, but it won't do to stand here; somebody will see us. Can't we?—come in the shop a minute."

Without speaking, and full of wonder, he followed her into the dark building. She led him past piles of old iron, wagon-tires, ploughshares, tubs of black water, anvils, and sledges to the forge and bellows at the back of the shop. She waited for a moment for him to speak, but he only looked at her questioningly, having almost steeled his heart against her.

"I come to warn you," she began, awkwardly, her eyes raised to his. "Toot Wambush has prejudiced the Whitecaps against you. He has convinced them that you reported the moonshiners. They are coming to-night to take you out. The others don't mean to kill you; they say it's just to whip you, and tar and feather you, and drive you out of the place, but he—Toot Wambush—will kill you if he can. He would not let you get away alive. He has promised the others not to use violence, but he will; he hates you, and he wants revenge. He'll do it and make the others share the responsibility with him—that's his plan."

He put his hand on the bellows-pole; the great leather bag rattled and gasped, and a puff of ashes rose from the forge.

"How do you happen to know this?" he asked, coldly. She shrank from him, and stared at him in silence.

"How do you know it?" he repeated, his tone growing fierce.

She drew the shawl with which she had covered her head more closely about her shoulders.

"Toot hinted at it himself," she said, slowly.

"When?"

"About an hour ago."

"You met him?"

"Yes."

"Are you a member of his gang?"

"Mr. Westerfelt," shrinking from him, "do —do you mean to insult me?"

"Would he have told you if he had thought you would give him away?"

"I reckon not—why, no."

"Then he considers you in sympathy with his murderous plans."

"I don't know, but I want you to keep out of his way. You must—oh, Mr. Westerfelt, you must go! Don't stand here; they are coming down the Hawkbill road directly. You could ride off towards Dartsmouth and easily get away, if you will hurry."

"I see," he answered, with a steady stare of condemnation; "you want to keep him from committing another crime — a more serious one."

She looked at him an instant as if puzzled, and then said:

"I want to keep him from killing you."

"Do you think he would take advantage of a helpless man?"

"I know it, Mr. Westerfelt; oh, I know he would!"

"Then you acknowledge he is a coward, and yet you—my God, what sort of a creature *are* you?"

She continued to stare at him wonderingly, as if half afraid. She moved suddenly into a moonbeam that streamed through a broken shingle in the roof. Her face was like white marble. In its terrified lines and angles he read nothing but the imprint of past weakness where he should have seen only pleading purity—the purity of a child cowed and awed by the object of a love so powerful, so self-sacrificing that she made no attempt to understand it. She had always felt her inferiority to others, and now that she loved her ideal of superiority she seemed to expect ill-treatment—even contempt—at his hands.

He looked away from her. The begrimed handle of the bellows creaked and swung as he leaned on it. He turned suddenly and impulsively grasped her hands.

"You are a good girl," he cried; "you have been the best friend I ever had. If I don't treat you better, it is on account of my awful nature. I can't control it when I think of that villain."

"He *has* treated you very badly," she said, slowly, in a voice that faltered.

"Where did you meet him and when?"

he asked, under his breath. "God knows I thought you were done with him."

"He came right to the house just after dark," returned Harriet. "Mother let him come in; she wanted to talk to him."

"Did he come to get you to go away with him, Harriet?"

"Yes, Mr. Westerfelt."

"And why didn't you go?"

"Oh, how *can* you ask such a question," she asked, "when you *know*—" She broke off suddenly, and then, seeing that he was silent, she added: "Mr. Westerfelt, sometimes I am afraid, really afraid, your sickness has affected your mind, you speak so strange and harsh to me. Surely I do not deserve such cruelty. I am just a woman, and a weak one at that; a woman driven nearly crazy through troubling about you." She raised a corner of her shawl to her eyes.

He saw her shoulders rise with a sob, then he caught her hands. "Don't—don't cry, little girl. I'd give my life to help you. Oh yes, *do* let me hold your hands, just this once; it won't make any difference."

She did not attempt to withdraw her hands from his passionate, reckless clasp, and, now more trustingly, raised her eyes to his.

"Sometimes I think you really love me," she faltered. "You have made me think so several times."

"I'm not ashamed of it," he said. "I've had fancies for women, but I have never felt this way before. It seems to me if I was to live a thousand years I'd never, never feel that you was like other women. Maybe you love me real deep, and maybe you just fancy me, but I'll never want any other human being like I want you. I have been a bad man—a careless, thoughtless man. Ever since I was a boy I have played with love. I was playing with fire—the fire of hell, Harriet—and I got burnt. In consequence of what I've done I suffer as no mortal ever suffered. Repentance brings contentment to some men, but they are not built like me. I don't do anything from morning to night but brood and brood over my past life."

"I thought you had had some trouble," she returned, sympathetically.

"Why did you think so?" he asked.

"You talked when you were out of your head. That's why I first took pity on you. I never saw a man suffer in mind as you did. You rolled and tumbled the first two or three nights and begged for forgiveness; often you spoke

so loud I was afraid others in the house would hear."

He opened his palms before her. "These hands are soaked in human blood—innocent human blood," he said, tragically. "I don't deny it; if it would do a particle of good I'd tell every soul on earth. I won a good girl's love, and when I got tired of her and left her she killed herself to escape the misery I put her in. I was unworthy of her, but she didn't know it, or want to know it. Nobody knows she took her own life except me and her mother, and it has ruined her life—taken away her only comfort in old age and made her my mortal enemy. She never gives me a minute's rest—she reminds me constantly that I'll never get forgiveness and never be happily married, and she is right—I never shall. My wicked nature demands too much of a woman. I can love, and do love, with all my soul, but my pride cannot be subdued. I—"

"I understand, Mr. Westerfelt," she broke in, quickly. "Don't bring up that subject again. What you said when I last saw you was enough. It almost kept me from coming to-night, but it was my duty; but you do not have to say any more about that." She took a step backward and stood staring at

him in mute misery. She had never felt that she was worthy of him, in a way, but his cold reference—as she understood it—to her misfortune released a spring of resentment she hardly knew was wound in her breast.

"Forgive me," he pleaded, trying to regain her hands. "I'll never mention it again. I promise you that—never again."

"It's all right," she answered, softening under his passionate gaze. "But it would be kind of you to avoid mentioning what I cannot help."

He was about to reply, but there was a sound of barking dogs from the mountain. "Go quick!" She caught her breath. "Don't wait! That may be them now. Don't let them kill you."

He did not stir. "You'd better go home," he said, calmly. "I don't care a straw what becomes of me. I've had enough of the whole business. I have got as much right to live as anybody else, and I will not be driven from pillar to post by a gang of outlaws, headed by a coward." He drew a revolver, and, half cocking it, carelessly twirled the cylinder with his thumb. "I've got five thirty-two-caliber shots here, and I think I can put some of them where they ought to go."

She pushed the revolver down with her hand. "No, no!" she cried, "you must not be reckless."

"I am a pretty good shot," he went on, bitterly, "and Toot Wambush shall be my first target, if I can pick him out. Then the rest may do what they like with me. You go home. It will do you no good to be seen with me."

She caught his arm. "If you don't go, I'll stay right here with you. Hush! Listen! What was—? Great Heavens, they are coming. Go! Go!"

She glided swiftly to the door, and he followed her. Coming along the Hawkbill road, about an eighth of a mile distant, they saw a body of horsemen, their heads and shoulders dressed in white. His revolver slipped from his fingers and rang on a fallen anvil. He picked it up mechanically, still staring into the moonlight. Again he wondered if he were afraid, as he was that night at the hotel.

"Run! get out a horse," she cried. "Mr. Washburn is there; he will help you! Go quick, for God's sake! I shall kill myself if they harm you." He stared at her an instant, then he put his revolver into his belt.

"All right, then, to oblige you; but you

must hurry home!" He hastened across the street and rapped on the office door.

"Who's thar?" called out Washburn from his bed.

"Me—Westerfelt."

There was a sound of bare feet on the floor inside and the door opened.

"What's up?" asked Washburn, sleepily.

"I want my horse; there's a gang of Whitecaps coming down the Hawkbill, and it looks like they are after me."

"My God!" Washburn began fumbling along the wall. "Where's the matches? Here's one!" He scratched it and lighted his lantern. "I'll git yore hoss. Stand heer, Mr. Westerfelt, an' ef I ain't quick enough make a dash on foot fer that strip o' woods over thar in the field. The fences would keep 'em from followin', an' you might dodge 'em."

When Washburn had gone into the stable, Westerfelt looked towards Harriet. She had walked only a few yards down the street and stood under the trees. He stepped out into the moonlight and signalled her to go on, but she refused to move. He heard Washburn swearing inside the stable, and asked what the matter was.

"I've got the bridles all tangled to hell," he answered.

"Hurry; anything will do!"

The Whitecaps had left the mountain-side and were now in sight on the level road. A minute more and Westerfelt would be a captive. He might get across the street unnoticed and hide himself in the blacksmith's shop, but they would be sure to look for him there. If he tried to go through the fields they would see him and shoot him down like a rabbit.

"Heer you are; which door, back or front?" cried Washburn.

"Front, quick! I've got to run for it! I'm a good mind to stand and make a fight of it."

"Oh no; hell, no! Mr. Westerfelt."

Washburn slid the big door open and kicked the horse in the stomach as he led him out.

"Git up, quick! They are at the branch. Blast it, they heerd the door—they've broke into a gallop!"

As Westerfelt put his foot into the stirrup he saw Harriet Floyd glide out of sight into the blacksmith's shop. She had determined not to desert him. As he sprang up, the girth snapped, and the saddle and blanket fell under his feet.

"God, they are on us!" gasped Washburn.

One of the gang raised a shout, and they came on with increased speed.

"Up! Up!" cried Washburn, kicking the saddle out of his way. "Quick! What's the matter?" Westerfelt felt a twinge in his old wound as he tried to mount. Washburn caught one of his legs and lifted him on his horse.

Westerfelt spurred the horse furiously, but the animal plunged, stumbled, and came to his knees—the bridle-rein had caught his foot. The foremost of the gang was now within twenty yards of him.

"Halt thar!" he yelled.

Westerfelt drew his horse up and continued to lash him with his bridle-rein.

"Shoot his hoss, but don't tetch him!" was the next command.

Several revolvers went off. Westerfelt's horse swayed at the rump and then ran sideways across the street and fell against a rail fence. Westerfelt alighted on his feet. He turned and drew his revolver, but just then his horse rolled over against his legs and knocked the weapon from his hand. It struck the belly of the horse and bounded into the middle of the street.

"Ha, we've got ye!" jeered the leader, as he and two or three others covered Westerfelt with their revolvers.

Chapter XIII

THE gang formed a semi-circle round Westerfelt and his horse. In their white caps and sheets they appeared ghostly and hideous, as they looked down at him through the eye-holes of their masks. One of them held a coil of new rope and tantalizingly swung it back and forth before his face.

"You must go with us up the Hawkbill fer a little moonlight picnic," he jeered. "We've picked out a tree up thar that leans spank over a cliff five hundred feet from the bottom. Ef the rope broke, ur yore noggin slipped through the noose, you'd never know how come you so."

"He's got to have some'n to ride," suggested another muffled voice; "we have done his horse up."

"Well, he's got a-plenty, an' he won't need 'em atter our ja'nt," jested the man with the rope. "You uns back thar, that hain't doin' nothin' but lookin' purty, go in the stable and trot out some'n fer 'im to ride; doggoned

ef I want 'im straddled behind me. His ha'nt 'ud ride with me every time I passed over the Hawkbill."

"Bill Washburn's in thar," said a man in the edge of the crowd. "I seed 'im run in as we rid up."

The leader, who sat on a restive horse near Westerfelt, called out:

"Hello in thar, Bill Washburn; git out some'n to put yore man on. Hurry up, ur we'll take you along to see the fun."

Washburn opened the office door and came out slowly.

"What do *you* say, Mr. Westerfelt? It's yore property. I won't move a peg agin the man that I work fer ef eve'y dam Whitecap in Christendom orders it."

"Care*ful*, care*ful*, young man; none o' your lip!" said the leader, half admiringly.

"Give 'em the lot!" It was the first time Westerfelt had spoken.

Washburn made no reply, but went slowly back into the stable.

Westerfelt's dying horse raised his head and groaned. A man near the animal dismounted and drew his revolver.

"What d' you say?" said he to Westerfelt. "Hadn't I better put 'im out o' his misery?"

"I'd be much obliged if you would." Westerfelt turned his face away. There was a moment's pause. The man waited for the horse's head to become still. Then he fired.

"Thanks," said Westerfelt. He looked round at the crowd, wondering which of the men could be Toot Wambush. He had an idea that he had not yet spoken, and was not among those nearest to him. Through the open door he could see Washburn's lantern moving about in the stable.

"Hurry up in thar," cried a tall figure. "Do you think we're gwine to—" He began to cough.

"How do you like to chaw cotton, Number Six?" a man near him asked.

"The blamed lint gits down my throat," was the reply. "I'd ruther be knowed by my voice'n to choke to death on sech truck."

From far and near on all sides came the dismal barking of dogs, but the villagers, if they suspected what was being enacted, dared not show their faces. Washburn led a horse through the crowd and gave the bridle to Westerfelt. He hesitated, as if about to speak, and then silently withdrew. Westerfelt mounted. The leader gave the order, and the gang moved back towards the moun-

tain. Two horsemen went before Westerfelt and two fell behind. As they passed the shop, dimly he saw the form of a woman lying on the ground just out of the moonlight that fell in at the door. Harriet had swooned. When they had gone past the shop, Westerfelt reined in his horse and called over his shoulder to Washburn, who stood in front of the stable. He would not leave her lying there if he could help it, and yet he did not want Wambush to know she had warned him. The gang stopped, and Washburn came to them.

"Any directions you want to give?" he asked of Westerfelt.

"I saw you looking for the account-book," answered Westerfelt, staring significantly into his eyes. "I was in the blacksmith's shop to-day and left it on the forge."

Washburn stared blankly at him for an instant, then he said, slowly, "All right."

"You'd better get it to-night," added Westerfelt.

"All right, sir. I'll attend to everything."

"Cool as a cucumber," laughed a man. "Next thing you know he'll give orders 'bout whar he wants to be buried, an' what to have cut on his grave-rock."

The whole gang laughed at this witticism,

and started on again. When they had gone about a hundred yards Westerfelt glanced back. He saw Washburn cross the road and enter the blacksmith's shop, and the next instant the shop was hidden by a sudden turn in the road. They passed the meeting-house and began to ascend the mountain. Here and there along the dark range shone the red fires of chestnut harvesters. The blue smoke hung among the pines, and the air was filled with the odor of burning leaves. They passed a camp—a white-covered wagon, filled with bags of chestnuts, two mules tethered to saplings, and three or four forms in dusky blankets lying round a log fire. As the weird procession passed, the mules drew back on their halters and threw their ears forward, but the bodies at the fire did not stir.

In about twenty minutes the band reached a plateau covered with a matting of heather. They went across it to the edge of a high precipice. It was as perpendicular as a wall. Below lay the valley, its forests of pines and cedars looking like a black lake in the clear moonlight.

"Git down, men, an' let's 'tend to business an' go back home," commanded the leader. "I have a hankerin' atter a hot breakfast."

Everybody alighted except Westerfelt. The leader touched him with his whip. "Will you git down, or do you want to be drug off like a saddle?"

"May I ask what you intend to do with me?" asked Westerfelt, indifferently.

The leader laughed. "Put some turkey red calico stripes on that broad back o' yorn, an' rub in some salt and pepper to cuore it up. We are a-gwine to l'arn you that new settlers cayn't run this community an' coolly turn the bluecoats agin us mount'in folks."

Westerfelt looked down on the masks upturned to him. Only one of the band showed a revolver. Westerfelt believed him to be Toot Wambush. He had not spoken a word, but was one of the two that had ridden close behind him up the mountain. One of the white figures unstrapped a pillow from the back part of his saddle. He held it between his knees and gashed it with a knife.

"By hunkey! they're white uns," he grunted, as he took out a handful. "I 'lowed they wus mixed; ef my ole woman knowed I'd tuck a poke uv 'er best goose feathers ter dab on a man she'd get a divorce."

Two or three laughed behind their masks. Another laugh went round as a short figure

returned from the bushes with a bucket of tar which had been left near the road-side.

"Heer's yore gumstickum." He dipped a paddle in it and flourished it before Westerfelt, who was still on his horse. "Say, mister, you don't seem inclined to say anything fer yorese'f; the last man we dressed out fer his weddin' begged like a whipped child, an' made no end o' promises uv good behavior."

Westerfelt got down from his horse. "I'm completely in your power," he replied. "I won't beg any man nor gang of men living to give me my rights. I suppose I am accused of having reported those fellows to the revenue men. I have simply to say that it is a lie!"

"Uh, uh!" said the leader; "*care*ful! *care*ful! Don't be reckless. We uns ain't the lyin' sort."

"I say it's a lie!" Westerfelt stared straight into the mask of Toot Wambush. The wearer of it started and half raised his revolver, but quickly concealed it under the sheet that hung below his waist. Everybody was silent, as if they expected a reply from Wambush, but he made none.

"Them pore Cohutta men lyin' in the Atlanta jail said so, anyway," returned the leader. "They ain't heer to speak fer the'rse'ves;

it's a easy thing to give them the lie behind the'r backs."

"They were mistaken, that's all," said Westerfelt. "Nobody but the revenue men themselves could tell the whole truth about it. I *did* pass the wagon—"

"An' eavedropped on our two men. Oh, we know you did, kase they heerd a sound, an' then as you didn't come for'ard, they 'lowed they had made a mistake, but when you finally did pass they knowed it wus you, an' that you'd been listenin'."

"That's the truth," admitted Westerfelt. "I had been warned that it would be dangerous for me to go about in the mountains alone. I heard the men talking, and stopped to find out who they were. I did not want to run into an ambush. As soon as I found out who they were I spoke to them and passed."

"At the stable, though, young man," reminded the leader—"at the stable, when the bluecoats fetched the prisoners an' the plunder in, they told you that they'd found them right whar you said they wus."

"You bet he did. What's the use a-jabberin' any longer?" The voice was unmistakably Wambush's, and his angry tones seemed to fire the impatience of the others. Westerfelt

started to speak, but his words were drowned in a tumult of voices.

"Go ahead!" cried several.

"Go ahead! Are you gwine to hold a court an' try 'im by law?" asked Wambush, hotly. "I 'lowed that point was done settled."

Westerfelt calmly folded his arms. "I've no more to say. I see I'm not going to be heard. You are a gang of cold-blooded murderers."

The words seemed to anger the leader.

"Shuck off that coat an' shirt!" was his order.

Westerfelt did not move. "I'm glad to say I'm not afraid of you," he said. "If you have got human hearts in you, though, you'll kill me, and not let me live after the degradation you are going to inflict. I know who's led you to this. It is a cowardly dog who never had a thing against me till I refused to let him have credit at my stable, when he owes an account that's been running for two years. He tried to kill me with a pistol and a knife when I was unarmed. He failed, and had to get you to help him. You are not a bit better than he is. I'm no coward. I've got fighting blood in me. Some of you'd acknowledge it if I was to tell you who my father

was. I have reason to believe there are men here to-night who fought side by side with him in the war, and were with him when he was shot down tryin' to hold up the flag at the battle of Chickamauga. One of the dirty cowards he once carried off the field when the whelp could hardly walk with a bullet in his leg!"

"What company wus that?" came from the edge of the crowd. The voice was quivering.

"Forty-second Georgia."

For a moment no one spoke, then the same voice asked:

"Who wus your pa, young man?"

"Captain Alfred Stone Westerfelt, under Colonel Mills."

The tall slender figure of the questioner leaned forward breathlessly and then pushed into the ring. Without a word he stood near Westerfelt, unpinned the sheet that was round him, and slowly took off his mask. Then he put a long forefinger into his mouth, pried a wad of cotton out of each cheek, and threw them on the ground.

It was old Jim Hunter. He cleared his throat, spat twice, wiped his mouth with his hand, and slowly swept the circle with his eyes.

"I'm the feller he toted out," he said. He cleared his throat again, and went on:

"Boys, if thar's to be any whippin', ur tarrin' an' featherin' in this case, I'm agin it tooth an' toe-nail. Cap Westerfelt's boy sha'n't have a hair o' his head tetched on sech flimsy evi*dence* as we've had while I'm alive. You kin think what you please o' me. I've got too much faith in the Westerfelt stock to believe that a branch of it 'u'd spy ur sneak. This is Jim Hunter a-talkin'."

Two others pushed forward, taking off their sheets and masks. They were Joe Longfield and Weston Burks.

"We are t'other two," said Longfield, dryly. "The Yanks killed off too blame many o' that breed o' men fer us to begin to abuse one at this late day. Ef Westerfelt's harmed, it will be over my dead body, an' I bet I'm as hard to kill as a eel."

"Joe's a-talkin' fer me," said Burks, simply, and he put his hand on his revolver.

"We've been too hasty," began Jim Hunter again. "We've 'lowed Toot to inflame our minds agin this man, an' now I'll bet my hat he's innocent. I'd resk a hoss on it."

"Thar's a gal in it, I'm a-thinkin'," opined Weston Burks, dryly.

"Men," cried the leader, "thar's a serious disagreement; we've always listened to Jim Hunter; what must we do about the matter under dispute?"

"Send the man back to town," cried a voice in the edge of the crowd. "He's the right sort to the marrow; I'll give 'im my paw an' wish 'im well."

"That's the ticket!" chimed in the man with the rope, as he tossed it over the horn of his saddle.

"I 'low myself we've been a leetle bit hasty," admitted the leader.

"Put down that gun! Drap it!" cried Jim Hunter, turning suddenly on Toot Wambush. "Ef you dare to cock a gun in this crowd, you'll never live to hear it bang!"

Wambush started to raise his revolver again, but Hunter knocked it from his hand. Wambush stooped to pick it up, but the old man kicked it out of his reach.

"You don't work that trick on this party," he said, hotly.

"I wasn't tryin' to draw it," muttered Wambush.

"You lie!" Then Hunter turned to the leader: "What d'ye think ortter be done with a man like that? Ef I hadn't a-been so quick

he'd a shot Westerfelt, an' before the law we'd all a-been accomplices in murderin' a innocent man."

"I move we give the whelp six hours to git out'n the county," said Joe Longfield. "You all know I've been agin Toot."

"That would be too merciful," said Burks.

"Boys," the leader cried, "Wambush has broke a rule in tryin' this thing on us. You've heerd the motion; is thar a second?"

"I second it," said Jim Hunter.

"It's been moved and seconded that Wambush be 'lowed six hours to git clean out o' the county; all in favor say yes."

There was almost a general roar.

"All opposed say no."

No one spoke for a moment, then Wambush muttered something, but no one understood what it was. He turned his horse round and started to mount. He had his left foot in the stirrup, and had grasped the mane of the animal with his right hand, when the leader yelled:

"Hold on thar! Not so quick, sonny. We don't let nobody as sneakin' as you are ride off with a gun in his hip pocket. S'arch 'im, boys; he's jest the sort to fire back on us an' make a dash fer it."

Hunter and Burks closed in on him. Wambush drew back and put his hand behind him.

"Damn you! don't you touch me!" he threatened.

The two men sprang at him like tigers and grasped his arms. Wambush struggled and kicked, but they held him.

"Wait thar a minute," cried the leader; "he don't know when to let well enough alone. You white sperits out thar with the tar an' feathers come for'ard. Wambush ain't satisfied with the garb he's got on."

A general laugh went round. With an oath Wambush threw his revolver on the ground and then his knife. This done, Hunter and Burks allowed him to mount.

"Don't let him go yet," commanded the leader; "look in his saddle-bags."

Wambush's horse suddenly snorted, kicked up his heels, and tried to plunge forward, but Burks clung to the reins and held him.

"He dug his spur into his hoss on this side like thunder," said a man in the crowd. "It's a wonder he didn't rip 'im open."

"S'arch them bags," ordered the leader, "an' ef he makes anuther budge before it's done, or opens his mouth fer a whisper, drag 'im right down an' give 'im 'is deserts."

Wambush offered no further resistance. Hunter fumbled in the bags. He held up a quart flask of corn whiskey over his head, shook it in the moonlight, and then restored it. "I hain't the heart to deprive 'im of that," he said, as he walked round the horse; "he won't find any better in his travels." On the other side he found a forty-four-caliber revolver.

"That 'u'd be a ugly customer to meet on a dark road," he said, holding it up for the others to see. "By hunky! it 'u'd dig a tunnel through a rock mountain. Say, Westerfelt, ef he'd 'a' got a whack at yer with this yore fragments 'u'd never a-come together on the day o' jedgment."

Westerfelt made no reply.

"Now, let 'im go," said the leader. "Ef he dares to be seed anywhar in the Cohutta section six hours frum now he knows what will come uv 'im. We refuse to shelter 'im any longer, an' the officers of the law will take 'im in tow."

The ring of men and horses opened for Wambush to pass out. He said nothing, and did not turn his head as he rode down the mountain into the mysterious haze that hung over the valley.

"What do you say, boys?" proposed Jim Hunter to Longfield and Burks. "Let's ride down the road a piece with Westerfelt."

"All right," both of them said. There was a general scramble of the band to get mounted. Westerfelt got on his horse and started back towards the village, accompanied by the three men. When they had ridden about a hundred yards, Westerfelt said:

"I'm taking you out of your way, gentlemen, and I think I'd rather go alone."

"Well, all right," said Hunter; "but you've got to take my gun. That whelp would resk his salvation to get even with you."

"I know it," said Westerfelt, putting the revolver into his pocket; "but he'll not try it tonight."

"No, I think he's gone fer good," said Longfield. "I guess he'll make fer Texas."

At a point where two roads crossed a few yards ahead of them, Westerfelt parted with the three men. They went back up the mountain, and he rode slowly homeward.

When he was in sight of the stable, he saw Washburn coming towards him on horseback.

"Hello! Did they hurt you, Mr. Westerfelt?" he asked.

"They never touched me."

"My Lord! how was that?"

"I told them I had nothing to do with the arrest; three of them were old friends of my father's, and they believed me. Did you find her—did you find Miss Harriet?"

"Yes; I couldn't make out what you meant 'bout the account-book at first, but I went over to the shop as soon as you all left. She wus lyin' thar on the ground in a dead faint. It took hard work to bring her to."

"You took her home?"

"Not right away; I couldn't do a thing with 'er. She acted like a crazy woman. She screamed an' raged an' tore about an' begged fer a hoss to ride atter you all. She wasn't in no fix to go; she didn't know what she wus about, an' that scamp would a-shot 'er. I believe on my soul he would."

They had reached the stable and dismounted, but neither moved to go in.

"I reckon you ought to know the truth, Washburn, since you saw her there so late at night," said Westerfelt, hesitatingly. "The fact is, she came to warn me. I suppose she knew Wambush would try to kill me, and she didn't want to—"

"She don't keer a snap for Wambush, ef that's what you mean," said Washburn, when

he saw that Westerfelt was going no farther. "I know it's been the talk, an' she no doubt did like him a little at one time, but the' ain't but one man livin' she keers fer now. It ain't none o' my business—I'm no hand to meddle, but I know women! She kep' cryin' an' sayin' that they'd murder you, an' ef they did she'd kill Toot Wambush ur die in the attempt. I'm tellin' you a straight tale."

Westerfelt sat down in a chair at the side of the door. Washburn led the horse into the stable and put him into a stall. Then he came back. Westerfelt's hands were over his face, but he took them down when he heard Washburn's step.

"Did—did she hurt herself when she fell?" he asked.

"No, she's all right." Washburn hesitated a moment, then he added: "Mr. Westerfelt, you ought to go up to yore room an' try to rest some; this night's been purty rough on you atter bein' down in bed so long."

Westerfelt rose silently and went through the office and up the stairs.

Chapter XIV

THE dawn was breaking when Harriet Floyd stole up to her room under the slant of the roof. She had no idea of trying to sleep. She sat down on the side of the bed, shivering with cold. Through the small-paned dormer window the gray light fell, bringing into vague relief the different objects in the room. Down in the back yard the chickens were flapping their wings and crowing lustily. Through the dingy glass she could see the cow-lot, the sagging roof of the wagon-shed, the barn, the ricks of hay, and the bare branches of the apple-trees still holding a few late apples. Her shoes were wet with dew and her dress and shawl hung limply about her.

There was a sudden step in the hall; a hand touched the latch; the door opened cautiously.

"Harriet!"

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Floyd glided across the floor, sat down

on the bed by her daughter, and stared at her in wonder.

"Where on earth have you been? I have been watching for you all night. Oh, my child, what is the matter? What has gone wrong?"

"I have been out trying to save Mr. Westerfelt. Toot led the Regulators down an' they took him out. I warned him, but he would not go in time and they took him to the mountain."

"Good Heavens! what did they intend to do with him?"

"Most of them meant only to frighten him and to whip him, but Toot Wambush will kill him if he gets a chance."

"I don't believe they'll harm him," said Mrs. Floyd, consolingly. "Anyway, we can't do anything; get in bed and let me cover you up; you are damp to the skin and all of a quiver; you'll catch your death sitting here."

Mrs. Floyd put her hand round Harriet, but she sprang up and pulled down a heavy cloak from a hook on the wall.

"I did not come here to go to bed!" she cried. She put the garment on and strode past her mother to the window. Mrs. Floyd followed her movements with an anxious glance. At the window Harriet turned and stamped her

foot. "Do you think I'm going to bed when I don't know—oh, my God, I can't bear it! I can't bear it!" She suddenly approached her bewildered mother, put her hands on her shoulders, and turned her face to the light. "You hear me, mother? As God in Heaven is my witness, if a hair of that man's head is harmed to-night, I'll kill Toot Wambush on sight. I'll kill him, if I hang for it! I swear it before God! Do you hear? I swear it — no power on earth shall stop me! I'll *do* it!"

Her body swayed. She made a step towards the door and sank down in a swoon. Mrs. Floyd sprang for a pitcher of water and sprinkled her face. The girl revived a little, and her mother raised her in her arms, put her on the bed, and drew the covers over her. Harriet closed her eyes drowsily. She did not seem wholly conscious. Mrs. Floyd went down-stairs and lighted a fire in the kitchen stove, and put on some water to heat. Then she went to the cook's room off the back porch and shook the door.

"Get up quick, Em', Harriet is sick!" she cried; then she ran up to her own room, opposite Harriet's, and finished dressing herself. As she was crossing the hall she saw a man on horseback in the street. She went out on

the veranda and called to him. At first she did not recognize him, but when he came nearer she saw that it was Washburn.

"Are you going to help Mr. Westerfelt?" she asked, in a low tone, as she leaned over the railing.

"I've done all that kin be done," he said. "I've been round among the citizens. They all say we'd be fools to try to do anything, Mrs. Floyd. Some are skeerd to death, an' others pretend they don't think Mr. Westerfelt's in danger."

She did not answer, fearing her voice would rouse Harriet, and after he had ridden away, she went back to the girl's room. Harriet was asleep, so she left her. A few hours later the barkeeper's wife came into the kitchen and told Mrs. Floyd the latest news. She dropped the pan she was cleaning and eagerly ran up to Harriet.

The noise of the opening door roused the girl. She sat up, stared in a dazed way at her mother an instant, then threw off the coverings and sprang out of bed.

"I've been asleep; Mr. Westerfelt! Oh, mother, why did you let me—"

"He's all right!" interrupted Mrs. Floyd. "They didn't touch a hair of his head."

Harriet stared open-mouthed.

"He's back safe and sound," went on Mrs. Floyd; "he proved himself innocent and they let 'im go."

"Oh, mother, mother!" Harriet put her arms round the old woman's neck and clung to her. "Thank God! Oh, mother, thank God —thank God!" Then she sat down in a chair and began hastily to put on her shoes.

"What are you going to do?"

"Going to see him."

"Not now; why—"

"I *will* see him. Let me alone; don't try to stop me!"

"You surely would not go to the stable! He—"

"I'd go anywhere to see him. I don't care what people say; I'm going to see him."

As Harriet bent to fasten her shoes, Mrs. Floyd touched her.

"Daughter, are you engaged to Mr. Westerfelt?"

Harriet did not look up. She still bent over her shoes, but the strings lay motionless in her fingers.

"No, he intimated he couldn't marry me, on—on account of my misfortune. Oh, don't let's talk about it. He and I understand

each other. He loves me, but we're not engaged."

Mrs. Floyd leaned against the mantelpiece. Her face had become hard and stern. Harriet started to leave the room, but Mrs. Floyd suddenly stepped between her and the door.

"He intimated that *that* would keep him from marrying you? My Lord—the coward!"

"Mother, don't—don't say that!"

"I thought he was a *man!* Why, he is lower than a brute."

Harriet disengaged herself from her mother's grasp, and passed on to the door. She turned on the threshold.

"I have no time to quarrel with you about him," she said, with a sigh; "you can have your opinion, nothing on earth will change mine. He loves me. I am going to see him now, and nothing you can say or do will prevent me."

Her shoes rattled loosely on the bare floor and on the stairs as she went down to the street.

During the night the sycamore-trees had strewn the ground with half-green, half-yellow leaves, and the tops of the fences were white with frost. Martin Worthy was taking

down the shutters at the store and calling through the window to his wife, who was unscrewing them on the inside. A farmer had left his team in front of the bar, and she saw him taking his morning drink at the counter and heard Buck Hillhouse giving him an exaggerated report of the visit of the White-caps. The eastern sky was yellowing, and a peak of the tallest mountain cut a brown gash in the coming sunlight. At the fence in front of Bufford Webb's cottage a cow stood lowing for admittance, and a milking-pail hung on the gate.

As Harriet passed, Mrs. Webb came out with a bucket of "slop" for the pig in a pen near the fence. She rested it on the top rail to speak to Harriet, but the hungry animal made such a noise that she hastened first to empty the vessel into the trough.

"Good-morning," she said, going quickly to the gate and wiping her hands on her apron; "did you-uns heer the racket last night?"

"Yes," answered Harriet.

"I didn't sleep a wink. We could see 'em frum the kitchen winder. It's a outrage, but I'm glad they did no rail harm."

The girl passed on. She found Washburn in front of the stable oiling a buggy. He

had placed a notched plank under an axle and was rapidly twirling a wheel.

"Where is Mr. Westerfelt?" she asked.

He raised his eyes to the window in the attic. "Up thar lyin' down. He's not in bed. He jest threw hisself down without undressing."

"Is he asleep?"

"I don't know, Miss Harriet, but I think not."

"Did they hurt him last night, Mr. Washburn?"

"Why, no, Miss Harriet, not a single bit."

She caught her breath in relief. "I thought maybe they had, and that he was not going to acknowledge it. Are—are you sure?"

"As sure as I could be of anything, Miss Harriet; I believe he is a truthful man, an' he told me they didn't lay the weight of a finger on 'im. You kin go up an' ax 'im. He ain't asleep; he looked too worried to sleep when he got back. He walked the floor the balance o' the night. Seems to me he's been through with enough to lay out six common men."

Harriet did not answer. She turned into the office and went up the stairs to Westerfelt's room. Round her was a dark, partially floored space containing hay, fodder, boxes

of shelled corn, piles of corn in the husk, and bales of cotton-seed meal. She rapped on the door-facing, and, as she received no response, she called out:

"Mr. Westerfelt, come out a minute."

She heard him rise from his bed, and in a moment he stood in the doorway.

"Oh, it's you!" he cried, in a glad voice. "I was afraid you were not well. I—"

"I am all right," she assured him. "But I simply couldn't rest till I saw you with my own eyes. When I heard they let you off I was afraid it was a false report. Sometimes, when those men do a bad thing they try to cover it up. Oh, Mr. Westerfelt, I am so—so miserable!"

He caught her hands and tried to draw her into his room out of the draught which came up the stairs, but she would not go farther than the door.

"No, I must hurry back home," she said. "Mother did not want me to come anyway; she didn't think it looked right, but I was so—so worried."

"I understand." He was feasting his eyes on hers; it was as if their hunger could never be appeased. "Oh, I'm so glad you come I've had you on my mind—"

But she interrupted him suddenly. Looking round at the bleak room and its scant furniture, she said: "I—I thought may be I could persuade you now to come back to your room at the hotel, where mother and I could wait on you. You do not look as well as you did, Mr. Westerfelt."

He smiled and shook his head.

"It's mighty good of you to ask me," he returned, "but this is good enough for me, and I don't want to be such a bother. The Lord knows I was enough trouble when I was there."

A look of sharp pain came upon her sensitive face for an instant, then she said: "I wish you wouldn't talk that way; you weren't one bit of trouble."

He looked away from her. He was, indeed, not at his best. His beard had grown out on his usually clean-shaven face and his cheeks looked sallow and sunken. He was tingling all over with a raging desire to throw his arms about her and tell her how he loved her and longed to make her his wife, but suddenly a mind-picture of Toot Wambush rose before him. He saw her deliberately lying to the officers to save him from arrest, and—worse than all—he saw her in the arms of the outlaw's father sobbing out a confession

of her love. He told himself then, almost in abject terror of some punishment held over him by God Himself, that Mrs. Dawson's prayers would be answered—if—if he gave way. "No," he commanded himself, "I shall stand firm. She's not for me, though she may love me—though she does love me now and would wipe out the past with her life. A woman as changeable as that would change again." Then a jealous rage flared up within him, and he laid a threatening hand on either of her shoulders and glared into her eyes.

"I told you last night I'd never bring up a certain subject again, but—"

"Then you'd better not," she said, so firmly, so vindictively, that his tongue was stilled. "I came here out of kindness; don't you dare —don't you insult me again, Mr. Westerfelt."

"Oh, do forgive me! I—" But she had shaken off his hands and moved nearer the stairway.

"You made a promise last night," she reminded him, "and I did not dream you had so little respect for me as to break it so soon."

He moved towards her, his hands outstretched imploringly, but a sound from below checked him. Some one was speaking to Washburn in the office. Then footsteps were

heard on the stairs, and Mrs. Bradley, followed by Luke, waddled laboriously up the steps. She was wiping her eyes, which were red from weeping. She glanced in cold surprise at Harriet, and passing her with only a nod, went to Westerfelt and threw her arms around his neck. Then with her head on his breast she burst into fresh tears.

"You pore, motherless, unprotected boy," she sobbed. "I can't bear it a bit longer. Me 'n' Luke wus the cause o' yore comin' to this oncivilized place anyway, an' you've been treated wuss 'an a dog. Ef Luke had one speck o' manhood left in him, he'd—"

Bradley advanced from the door, and drew his wife away from Westerfelt.

"Don't act so daddratted foolish," he said. "No harm hain't been done yet—no *serious* harm." Still holding her hand, he turned to Westerfelt: "They've tried to do you dirt, John, I know, but them boys will be the best friends on earth to you now. Ef you ever want to run fer office all you got to do is to announce yorese'f. Old Hunter wus down at Bill Stone's this mornin' as we passed buyin' his fine hoss to replace yore'n."

"I reckon they've run Toot Wambush clean off," put in Mrs. Bradley, looking significantly

at Harriet. She expected the girl to reply, but Harriet only avoided her glance. Mrs. Bradley rubbed her eyes again, put her handkerchief into her pocket, and critically surveyed the damp, bedraggled dress of the girl.

"It's mighty good of you to come down to see 'im all by yourself so early," she said; "some gals wouldn't do sech a thing. The report is out that you notified John of what the band intended to do."

Harriet nodded, and looked as if she wanted to get away.

"It wus mighty good of you, especially as you an' Toot are sech firm friends," went on Mrs. Bradley; "but it's a pity you wusn't a little sooner with yore information."

"She told me in plenty of time," corrected Westerfelt. "It was my fault that I didn't get away. I didn't go when Miss Harriet told me to."

His reply did not please Mrs. Bradley, as she showed by her next remark. "I'd think you'd be afeerd o' makin' Toot madder at you 'n he already is," she said to Harriet.

The girl did not look at her. She was watching Westerfelt, who had suddenly moved to the bed and sat down. When she spoke she

directed her explanation to Bradley rather than to his wife.

"Mother and I thought Mr. Westerfelt ought not to stay here alone, and that we'd get him to come over to the room he had in the hotel; so we—"

"You an' yore mother hain't knowed 'im sence he wus knee-high like me an' Luke has," jealously retorted Mrs. Bradley. "I reckon it's time *we* wus givin' the boy a little attention. We've got the buggy down thar waitin', John, an' a hot breakfast ready at home. I won't stand no refusal. You jest got to come with us; you needn't make no excuse."

"I'm not sick," answered Westerfelt, with a faint smile. He glanced at Harriet. With an unsteady step she was moving away. He wanted to call to her, but the presence of the others sealed his lips. She turned out into the semi-darkness of the loft, and then they heard her descending the stairs.

The sun was rising as she went back to the hotel. No one was in the parlor. She entered it and closed the door after her. She drew up the window-shade and looked down the street till she saw Mrs. Bradley and Westerfelt pass in a buggy. Then she went into

the dining-room, where a servant was laying a cloth on a long table, took down a stack of plates from a shelf, and began to put them in their places.

When breakfast was over that morning Westerfelt went back to the stable. While sitting in the office, Long Jim Hunter came to the door leading a fine bay horse, a horse that Westerfelt recognized at a glance as one he had seen and admired before.

"Oh, Mr. Westerfelt," he called out over Washburn's shoulder, who had gone to him. "I wish you'd step heer a minute. I know you don't do the rough work round heer, but I like to have my dealin's with the head of a shebang. Wash, heer, never did have much more sense 'n a chinch, nohow."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Hunter?" asked the man addressed, coming out.

There was a decidedly sheepish look in the old man's face, and he swung the halter of the horse awkwardly to and fro.

"Well, you see, it's jest this way, Westerfelt," he began, with an effort. "I've bought this blamed hoss frum Bill Stone an' I want to leave 'im heer with you. I want you to put 'im through any sort o' work you see fit; he's too blam' fat an' frisky anyhow."

Westerfelt comprehended the whole situation, but he did not want to accept the horse. "Why, Mr. Hunter, really—" he began.

"Oh, we'll take yore hoss," laughed Washburn. "We kin take the kinks out'n his mane an' tail an' make 'im wish he never wus born. Oh, Lordy, yes, we want 'im, an' ef you've got a good saddle an' bridle ur a buggy hustle 'em around."

"Well, you'd better 'tend to 'im." Hunter tossed the halter to Washburn. "I'll be blamed ef I want 'im." And he turned and without another word walked away.

"It's wuth three o' the one they shot," was Washburn's laconic observation. He looked the animal over admiringly and slapped him so vigorously under the belly that the horse grunted and humped his back.

Cartwright, like nearly every other Georgian village, had its lawyer. Bascom Bates was a young man of not more than thirty, but he was accounted shrewd by many older legal heads, who had been said to have advised him to move to a larger place. When business did not come to his office, Bates sometimes went after it. If a woman lost a husband in a railway wreck or was knocked off the track where he had no right to be, Bates called

as early as possible and offered to direct a suit against the corporation for damages at half the usual price—that is, as Bill Stone once put it, the widow got half and Bates half, which nobody seemed to think exorbitant, because it cost a lawyer a good deal to get his education, and court convened but twice a year. He was among the first to call on Westerfelt that morning, and with a mysterious nod and crooking of his fingers in the air he induced the young man to follow him into one of the vacant stalls in the back part of the long building.

"Thar's something that has jest struck me, Westerfelt," he began, in the low voice of an electioneering candidate, and he possessed himself of one of Westerfelt's lapels and began to rub his thick, red fingers over it. "I wouldn't have you mention me in the matter, for really I hain't got a thing ag'in any of these mount'in men, but I thought I'd say to you as a friend that this is a damageable case. Them men could be handled for what they done last night, and made to sweat for it—sweat hard cash, as the feller said."

Westerfelt stared at him in surprise.

"Oh," he said, "I never thought of that. I—"

"Well, there ain't no harm in looking at the thing from all sides," broke in the lawyer, as deliberately as his professional eagerness would permit. "A good price could be made out of the ring-leaders anyway. Old Jim Hunter's got two hundred acres o' bottom land as black as that back yard out thar, an' it's well stocked, an' I know all the rest o' the gang an' their ability to plank up. Maybe it wouldn't even get as far as court. Them fellers would pay up rather than be published all over creation as—"

Westerfelt drew back, smiling. He did not really dislike Bates, and he attributed his present proposition to the desire to advance in his profession, but he was far from falling into the present proposal.

"I haven't the slightest intention of prosecuting, Mr. Bates," he declared, firmly. "In fact, nothing could persuade me to take a single step in that direction."

The face of the lawyer fell.

"Oh, that's the way you feel. Well," scratching his chin, "I don't know as it makes much difference one way or the other, but I hope, Mr. Westerfelt, that you won't mention what I said. These fellers are the very devil about boycottin' people."

"It shall go no further," answered Westerfelt, and together they walked to the front. A few minutes after Bates had gone across the street to his office, old Hunter slouched into the stable and stood before Westerfelt. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in Bates's direction and grinned uneasily. Then he spat, and delivered himself of this:

"I'll bet I kin make a powerful good guess at what that feller wanted to see you about."

Westerfelt smiled good-naturedly. He felt irresistibly drawn towards the old man.

"Do you think you could, Mr. Hunter?"

"I'd bet a ten-acre lot agin a ginger-cake. An' I'll bet some'n else; I'll bet ten dollars 'gin a nickel that Cap. Westerfelt's boy ain't a-gwine to harbor no ill-will agin one o' his daddy's old friends that wus actin' the damn fool 'fore he knowed who he wus monkeyin' with."

"You'd win on that bet, Mr. Hunter," and Westerfelt gave the old man his hand.

Hunter's shook as with palsy as he grasped and held it. Tears rose in his eyes. "Lord, Lord A'mighty!" he said, "when I reecolect that the young chap 'at stood up thar so spunky all by hisse'f last night in that moonlight an' sassed all of us to our teeth was Cap.

Westerfelt

Westerfelt's boy — by God, I jest want some hound dog to come an' take my place on God's earth—so I do. I want some able-bodied corn-field nigger to wear a hickory-withe out on my bare back." Then he dropped Westerfelt's hand and strode away.

Chapter XV

WESTERFELT accepted the urgent invitation of the Bradleys to live in their house awhile. For the first week his wound gave him pain and his appetite failed him, which was due as much, perhaps, to mental as bodily trouble, for Harriet Floyd was on his mind constantly. Thoroughly disgusted with himself for having in the past treated the hearts of women lightly, he now drew the rein of honor tightly when he thought of his position and hers. He told himself he would never go to see her again till he had made up his mind to forget her love for Wambush and every rasping fact pertaining to it, and honorably ask her to be his wife. There were moments in which he wondered if she were not, on her part, trying to forget him, and occasionally, when his spirits sank lowest, he actually harbored the fear that her affection might already have returned to Wambush. He recalled something he had once heard that a woman would love a man who was unfortunate more

surely than one who was not, and this thought almost drove him mad with jealousy, for was she not likely, through pity, to send her heart after the exile? Now and then, in passing the hotel, he caught a glimpse of Harriet on the veranda or at the window, but she always turned away, as if she wished to avoid meeting him, and this pained him, too, for she had become his very life, and such cold encounters were like permanent steps towards losing her forever, which, somehow, had never quite shaped itself into a possibility in his mind.

It was a warm day in the middle of November. Westerfelt and Washburn stood at the stable waiting for the hack, which, once a day, brought the mail and passengers from Darley. It had come down the winding red clay road and stopped at the hotel before going on to the stable.

"I see a woman on the back seat," remarked Washburn. "Wonder why she didn't git out at the hotel."

In a moment the hack was in front of the stable, and Budd Ridly, the driver, had sprung down and was helping a woman out on the opposite side. When she had secured her shawl and little carpet-bag, she walked round the hack and came towards Westerfelt.

It was Sue Dawson. She wore the same black cotton bonnet and gown, now faded and soiled, that she had worn at her daughter's funeral.

"Howdy' do?" she said, giving him the ends of her fingers, and resting her carpet-bag on her hip. "I *'lowed* you'd be glad to see me." There was a malicious gleam in her little blue eyes, and her withered face was hard and pale and full of desperate purpose.

"How do you do?" he replied.

She smiled as she slowly scrutinized him.

"Well, you *don't* look as if you wus livin' on a bed of ease exactly," she said, in a tone of satisfaction; "you've been handled purty rough, I reckon, fer a dandified feller like you, but—" She stopped suddenly and glanced at Washburn, who was staring at her in surprise, then went on: "Budd Ridly couldn't change a five-dollar bill, an' he 'lowed I might settle my fare with the proprietor uv the shebang. Don't blame Budd; I tol' 'im I wus well acquainted with the new stableman; an' I am, I reckon, ef *any*body is. I had business over heer," she went on, as she got out her old-fashioned pocket-book and fumbled it with trembling fingers. "I couldn't attend to it by writin'; some'n's gone wrong

with the mails; it looks like I cayn't git no answers to the letters I write."

Washburn took the money and went into the office for the change.

"I didn't see what good it would do to write, Mrs. Dawson," said Westerfelt; "maybe it was wrong for me not to, but I've had a lot to bear; and you—"

"*That* you have," she interrupted, her face hardening, as she looked across the ploughed fields, bordered by strips of yellow broom-sedge, towards the pine forests in the west. "You wus cut bad, I heer, an' laid up fer a week ur so, an' then the skeer them White-caps give you on top of it must a' been awful to a proud sperit like yore'n; but even sech as that will wear off *in time*. But nothin' *human*, John Westerfelt—nothin' *human* kin fetch back the dead. Sally's place is unoccupied. I'm doin' her work every day, an' her dressin' an' pore little Sunday fixin's is all still a-hangin' on the wall. She wus the only gal—"

Washburn came back with the change. The old woman's thin hands quivered as she took the coin and slowly counted the pieces into her pocket-book. Washburn suspected from the expression of Westerfelt's face that the conversation was of a private nature, so

he went out to the hack to help Budd unharness the horses.

"No," went on the old woman, sternly, "you've brought about a pile o' misery in yore life, John Westerfelt, an' you hain't a-gwine to throw it off like a ol' coat, an' dance an' make merry. You may try that game; but yore day is over; you already bear the mark of it in yore face an' sunk cheeks. You've got another gal on yore string by this time, too."

"You are mistaken, Mrs. Dawson."

"How about the one at the hotel that nussed you through yore sick spell?"

"There is nothing between us." He hesitated, then added: "Nothing at all, nor there never will be."

"*You* say thar hain't, but that don't prove it. I want to lay eyes on *her;* I can tell ef you have been up to yore old tricks when I see 'er. Ef she's got a purty face you have."

He made no reply.

She hitched her burden up on her left hip and curved her body to the right. "I'm a-gwine to put up thar, an' I'll see. The Bradleys 'll think quar ef I don't put up with them, I reckon; but I'm gwine to try hotellin' fer once. Right now it's in my line uv business.

Good-mornin'; I don't owe you anything—nothin' in the money way, I mean. Ah! you think I'm a devil, I reckon; well, you made me what I am. I'm yore work, John Westerfelt!"

He stood in the stable door and watched the little bent figure walk away. He saw her pass the cottages, the store, the bar, and enter the hotel; then he went through the stable into the back yard and stood against the wall in the warm sunlight. He didn't want Washburn to come to him just then with any questions about business. A sudden, startling fear had come to him. He was going to lose Harriet now, and through Mrs. Dawson, and it would be the just consequences of his early indiscretion.

o

Chapter XVI

AS the old woman entered the hotel she saw no one. Looking into the parlor, and seeing it empty, she went down the hall to the rear of the house. The door of the dining-room was open. Mrs. Floyd was there arranging some jars of preserves in the cupboard, and turned at the sound of the slipshod feet.

"Good-morning," Mrs. Floyd said; "won't you have a seat?"

Mrs. Dawson put her shawl and carpet-bag on a chair. "I want to put up heer to-night," she said. "I never put up at a tavern in my life, an' I'm a sorter green hand at it. I reckon you could tell that by lookin' at me."

"We are pretty full," said Mrs. Floyd; 'but we will manage to make a place for you somehow. My daughter will show you a room. Oh, Harriet!"

"Yes, mother." Harriet came in from the kitchen. She had overheard the conversa-

tion. Mrs. Dawson eyed her critically and slowly from head to foot.

"This lady wants to stop with us," said Mrs. Floyd; "show her to the little room upstairs."

Harriet took the carpet-bag. "Do you want to go up now?"

"I reckon I mought as well."

Harriet preceded her to a little room at the head of the stairs. The girl was drawing up the window-shade to let light into the room when the old woman spoke. "You are the gal that nussed John Westerfelt through his spell, I reckon," she said.

Harriet turned to her in surprise. "Yes, he was with us," she replied. "Do you know him?"

"A sight better 'n you do, I'm a-thinkin'." Mrs. Dawson seated herself, took off her bonnet, and began nervously folding it on her knee. "But not better 'n you *will*, ef you don't mind what yo're about."

Harriet flushed in mingled embarrassment and anger. Without replying, she started to leave the room, but Mrs. Dawson caught the skirt of her dress and detained her.

"You don't know who I am. I had a daughter—"

"I know all about it." Harriet jerked her skirt from the old woman's hand and looked angrily into her face. "She drowned herself because he didn't love her. I *do* know who you are; you are a devil disguised as a woman! He may have caused your daughter's death, but he did not do it intentionally, but you—you would murder him in cold blood if you could. You have come all the way over here to drive him to desperation. You—you are a bad woman. I mean it!"

For a moment Mrs. Dawson was thrown entirely off her guard by the unexpected attack. She rose and stretched out a quivering hand for her carpet-bag, which she had put on the bed. She shifted it excitedly from one hand to the other, and looked towards the door.

"Yo're jest one more uv his fool victims, I kin see that," she gasped. "He's the deepest, blackest scoundrel on the face of the earth!"

Harriet's eyes flashed. "He's the best man I ever saw, and has had more to put up with. You've come over here to persecute him; but you sha'n't stay in this house. Get right out; we don't want you!"

"Why, Harriet, what on *earth* do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Floyd, suddenly entering the room.

Harriet pointed at Mrs. Dawson. "This woman has come over here to worry the life out of Mr. Westerfelt because he didn't marry her daughter. She wrote threatening letters to him while he was at death's door, and is doing her best now to drive him crazy. She sha'n't stay under this roof while I am here. You know I mean exactly what I say, mother. She goes or I do. Take your choice!"

"Mr. Westerfelt has had a lot of trouble," began Mrs. Floyd, wondering what it could all be about; "everybody here is in sympathy with him. We are all liable to mistakes; surely you can pardon him if—"

"Not while I'm above ground," shrieked the old woman. She dropped her bag, then picked it up awkwardly, and started to leave by a door which opened into another room. She burst into hysterical weeping when Mrs. Floyd caught her arm to detain her. "Not while I'm alive an' have my senses," she went on, in sobs and piping tones. "I'll hound him to his grave. I wouldn't stay heer over night to save my life. I'd ruther sleep in a hay-stack ur in a barn-loft."

Harriet turned her white, rigid face to the window, and stood between the parted cur-

tains as still as a statue. Mrs. Floyd tried again to detain the old woman, but she flounced out of the room and thumped down-stairs.

The next morning a young girl came into the village by one of the mountain roads. Her face was sad and troubled, and she looked as if she had walked a long distance. She was poorly dressed, and her shoes were coarse and coated with dust, but her face was pretty and sweet.

In front of the meeting-house she stopped and sat down on a log near the road-side. When people passed she would draw her sun-bonnet over her face and turn her head from them. Suddenly she rose and trudged on to the post-office.

It was a busy day at Cartwright, and the little porch was filled with loungers. Old Jim Hunter was there with his long-barrelled rifle and a snarling opossum, the tail of which was held between the prongs of a split stick. When the animal showed a disposition to bite anybody, or crawl away, he subdued it instantly by turning the stick and twisting its tail. Joe Longfield had come with a basket of eggs packed in cotton-seed to exchange for their value in coffee, and the two wags were

entertaining the crowd with jokes at the expense of each other.

As the girl passed into the store Martin Worthy was weighing a pail of butter for a countryman in a slouch hat and a suit of brown jeans. She returned his nod and went to the little pen in the corner in which the mail was kept.

"I cayn't 'low you but ten cents a pound for yore butter," Worthy said to the man. "Yore women folks never *will* work the water out, an' it's al'ays puffy an' white. Town people don't want sech truck. It has to be firm and yaller. Look what the Beeson gals fetch once a week. I gladly pay 'em fifteen fer it." He uncovered a pile of firm golden balls and struck them with his paddle. "Any woman can make sech butter ef they won't feed the cows cotton-seed an' will take 'nough trouble."

When the man had joined the group outside, Worthy came from behind the counter into the pen, wiping his hands on a sheet of brown paper.

"I don't think thar's a thing fer any o' yore folks, Miss Hettie," he said to the girl, "but I'll look jest to satisfy you." He took a bundle of letters from a pigeon-hole and ran them

hurriedly through his hands. "Not a thing," he concluded, putting the letters back; "jest as I thought."

She paused for a moment as if about to ask a question. She put a thin hand on the cover of a sugar-barrel, and looked at him timidly from the depths of her bonnet as he came out of the pen, but she said nothing. As she started to go, her skirt caught on a sliver of the barrel, and, as she stooped to unfasten it, she almost fell forward. But she recovered herself and went out of the door towards the hitching-rack in front, paused, and looked back at the road over which she had come.

"Don't seem to know exactly whar she *does* want to go," remarked Jim Hunter, breaking the silence which had followed her departure from the store. "Who is she, anyway?"

"Oz Fergerson's daughter Hettie," replied Worthy, leaning against the door-jamb. "She don't look overly well; I reckon that's why she quit workin' at the hotel. She's dyin' to git a letter from some'rs; she comes reg'lar every day an' goes away powerfully disappointed."

"Never seed her before as I know of," said Longfield, handing Worthy his basket of eggs.

The girl suddenly turned down the side-

walk. She passed Mrs. Webb's cottage and the bar and went into the hotel. Mrs. Floyd met her at the door.

"Mis' Floyd, I want to see Harriet," she said.

"She's up-stairs," replied Mrs. Floyd. "I'll call her; but you'd better go in to the fire."

The girl shook her head and muttered something Mrs. Floyd could not understand, so she left her in the hall.

Mrs. Floyd found Harriet in her room. "Hettie Fergerson is down-stairs and wants to see you," she said. "She still acts very strange. I asked her to go into the parlor, but she wouldn't."

"How do you do, Hettie?" said Harriet, as she came down the steps. "Come into the parlor; you look cold."

The girl hesitated, but finally followed Harriet into the warm room. They sat down before the fire, and there was an awkward silence for several minutes, then the visitor suddenly pushed back her bonnet and said, in a hard, desperate tone:

"Where is Toot Wambush, Harriet?"

Harriet looked at her in surprise for an instant, then she answered:

"Why, Hettie, how could I know? Nobody in Cartwright does now, I reckon."

"I thought *you* might." Both girls were silent for a moment, then the visitor looked apprehensively over her shoulder at the door. "Is yore ma coming in here?"

"No; she's busy in the kitchen; do you want to see her?"

"No." The girl spoke quickly and moved uneasily.

"You came to see me?"

"I come to see *some*body—oh, Harriet, I'm *so* miserable! You didn't suspicion it, Harriet, but I'm afraid that man has made a plumb fool of me. I haven't slept hardly one wink since they driv' 'im off. I—" She put her hand to her eyes, and as she paused Harriet thought she was crying, but a moment later, when she removed her hand, her eyes were dry.

"Why did you come to—to see me, Hettie?" questioned Harriet.

"Because," was the slow-coming reply, "I thought maybe he had wrote back to you."

"He has never written to me, Hettie—never a line."

The face of the girl brightened. "Then you ain't engaged to him, *are* you, Harriet?"

"The idea! of course not."

"Oh, I'm mighty glad of that," exclaimed

the visitor. "You see, I'm such a fool about him I got jealous. Oh, Harriet, there ain't no use in me tryin' to deceive myself; I know he would marry you at the drop of a hat if you'd have him. I know that, and still I am crazy about him. I ain't much to blame, Harriet, if I am foolish. He made me so, an' 'most any pore, lonely girl like I am would care for a good-looking man like he is. Oh, Harriet, it is awfully humiliating to have to think it, but I believe the reason he treats me like he does is that I showed him too plainly how much I loved him."

"I did not suspect till the other day," said Harriet, to avoid that point, "that he was paying you any particular attention. Mother told me he often drove you out home."

"Oh, la, that ain't a circumstance, Harriet! He used to come out home mighty nigh every day or night. Pa an' ma think he is a regular prince. You know he swore pa out of a big whiskey scrape in Atlanta, and since then pa and him has been mighty thick. They thought all along that Toot wanted to marry me, and it made 'em mighty proud, and then it began to look like he was settin' up to you. That's why I quit staying here, Harriet. I couldn't be around you so much and know—

or think, as I did, that he was beginning to love you."

"I don't think," protested Harriet, "that he was ever deeply interested in me. You must not think that. In fact, I believe now, Hettie, that you and he will be happily married some day—if he ever gets out of his trouble."

Hettie drew in her breath quickly and held it, raising a glad glance to the speaker's face.

"Why do you think so, Harriet?—oh, you are just saying this to make me feel better."

Harriet deliberated for a moment, then she said: "He was here the night they run him off—the night they all took Mr. Westerfelt out. Mother and I had a long talk with him. Mother talked straight to him about flirting with you, and told him what a good, nice girl you were, and—"

"Oh, did she, Harriet? I could hug her for it!"

"Yes, and he talked real nice about you, too, and admitted he had acted wrong. Hettie, I believe in time that he'll come back and ask you to marry him. I believe that in the bottom of my heart."

The countenance of the visitor was now aglow with hope.

"Maybe he will—maybe he will," she said.

"I was afraid I let him see too plain that I was a fool about him, but some men like that, I reckon; he always seemed to come oftener. Harriet, one thing has worried the life nearly out of me. I heard Frank Hansard say a young man never would think as much of a girl after she let him kiss her. I'm no hypocrite—I'm anything else; but as much as I'd love to have a young man I cared for kiss me, I'd die in my tracks before I'd let 'im put his arm around me if I thought it would make 'im think less of me. Do you reckon" (she was avoiding Harriet's eyes)—"do you think that would make any difference with Toot—I mean, with any young man?"

Harriet smiled in spite of the look of gravity in Hettie's eyes.

"Some men might be that way," she finally said, consolingly—she was thinking of the innate coarseness of Hettie's lover—"but I don't think Mr. Wambush is. That was one of the first things my mother ever taught me. She told me she'd learned it by experience when she was a girl. I don't pretend to be better than other girls, but I've always made men keep their distance."

Hettie shrugged her shoulders, as if to throw off some unpleasant idea.

"Oh, I don't care. I'd do it over again. Lord, I couldn't help it. I love him so, and he is so sweet and good when he tries to be. He thinks I'm all right, too, in some ways. He says I'm just the girl to marry a dare-devil like he is. Did you ever know it was me that helped get him away from the revenue men the night he had a barrel o' whiskey on his wagon?" Hettie laughed impulsively, and her graceful little body shook all over.

"Mother thought you had a hand in it," answered Harriet, with an appreciative smile.

"It was fun," giggled Hettie. "Toot drove nipitytuck down the street from the Hawk-bill as fast as he could lick it, and them a-gallopin' after 'im. I had been on the front porch talkin' to his father, who was anxious about 'im and wanted to see 'im. Toot pulled up at the side gate an' said: 'No use, Het, damn it; I can't make it, and they'll know my horse and wagon an' prove it on me.' Then I thought what to do; the men wasn't in sight back there in the woods. Quicker 'n lightnin', I made Toot push the whiskey across the porch into the kitchen an' shet the door, an' when the revenue men stopped at the gate Toot was settin' up as cool as a cucumber in his wagon talkin' to me over the fence. I

think he was asking me to get in the wagon and go out home with him. I never seed—saw 'im so scared, though, in my life; but la me! it was fun to me, an' I had more lies on my tongue 'n a dog has fleas.

"'Did you have a barrel on that wagon a minute ago?' one of the two men asked.

"'What'n the hell are you talkin' about?' asked Toot. 'I haven't seed—seen no barrel.'" Hettie was trying to speak correctly, but the spirit of the narrative ran away with her meagre ideas of grammar.

"'Oh,' said I, 'you've got the wrong sow by the ear; a wagon went whizzin' by here a minute ago like it was shot out of a gun.'

"'Which way?' the officer asked, rippin' out an oath that 'u'd a-took the prize at a cussin'-bee.

"I pointed down the road and said: 'I hear it a-clatterin' now,' and off they galloped. Well, Toot soon loaded the whiskey again and drove off up the mountain, but he's laughed about that a hundred times and told the moonshiners about it. Whenever I meet one in the road—I know the last one of 'em—they ask me if I've seen a whiskey wagon anywheres about. Harriet," she added, more soberly, "you've give me a sight of comfort.

Now tell me about you-know-who. Toot told me the last time he was at our house that he knowed you were gone on that new feller. I'm sorry they fit, but he had no business refusin' to credit Toot. Nobody else ever did the like, and it was calculated to rile him, especially when he was full an' loaded for bear, as folks say. How are you and him makin' out, Harriet?"

Harriet's face had taken on a sober look, and she hesitated before replying; finally she said:

"There is nothing between us, Hettie, and I'd rather not talk about him."

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry!" the other exclaimed. "He is such a good-looking man, and so many thought you and him would come to a understanding. They say a girl gets a mighty good whack at a man when he is laid up flat of his back. I never have tried it, but it looks reasonable."

Then Hettie rose. "I'm goin' to stay to dinner with you all," she said, "and I'm going out now to help yore ma. Pore woman, she looked dead tired jest now!"

A few minutes later Mrs. Floyd came to Harriet, who was still seated in the parlor, an expression of deep thought on her face.

"Harriet," said the old lady, wiping her damp hands on her apron, "Hettie has gone to work washing dishes in there like a house a-fire. I declare she's a big help; as soon as she comes about I feel rested, for I know she won't leave a thing undone. What have you been saying to her? I never saw her so cheerful. She's been runnin' on in the kitchen like a fifteen-year-old child. I declare I can't keep from liking her. You must a-told her some'n about Toot Wambush."

"I did," admitted Harriet. "Mother, I've been standing in her way. I believe he likes her, and will marry her now that I have given him his last answer."

"Do you really, daughter?"

"Yes, I think he will—I'm almost sure of it, and I just had to tell her so, she looked so down-hearted."

Mrs. Floyd laid her hand on Harriet's head and smiled.

"You deserve to be happy, too, daughter, and somehow I feel like you are going to be. Mr. Westerfelt is nobody's fool; he knows you're sweet and good, and—"

"I don't want to talk about him, mother," Harriet said, firmly, as she rose. "I think

we ought to keep Hettie a few days; she'd like to be near the post-office, I know."

"Well, the Lord knows I'm willing," consented Mrs. Floyd, as she followed her daughter to the kitchen.

Chapter XVII

SUE DAWSON leaned on the front gate at the Bradleys'.

"Hello! Hello! Hello! in thar!" she cried, in a shrill, piping voice. No one replied. "I'm a good mind to go in anyway," she thought. "I reckon they hain't got no bitin' dog." She raised the iron ring from the post and drew the sagging gate through the grooves worn in the pebbly ground and entered the yard. The front and back doors were open, and she could see a portion of the back yard through the hall.

No one seemed to be in the house. A young chicken had hopped up the back steps, crossed the entry, and was stalking about in the hall chirping hollowly, as if bewildered by its surroundings. Across the rear door a sudden gust of wind blew a wisp of smoke, and then it occurred to Mrs. Dawson that some one might be in the back yard. She drove the chicken before her as she stalked through the hall.

Westerfelt

Martha Bradley was making soap. With her back to the house, she was stirring a boiling mixture of grease and lye in a large wash-pot. Under the eaves of the kitchen stood an ash-hopper, from the bottom of which trickled a tiny amber stream.

"Howdy, Marthy?" said Mrs. Dawson, behind Mrs. Bradley's back. "It was so still in the house, I 'lowed you wus all dead an' buried."

Mrs. Bradley turned and dropped her paddle. "Why, ef it hain't Mis' Dawson, as I'm alive! Whar on earth are you bound fer?"

"Jest come over fer a day ur so," was the reply. "I thought some o' stoppin' at the hotel, but, on second thought, I 'lowed you an' Luke mought think strange ef I did, so heer I am."

"I've al'ays got room fer a old neighbor, an' you'd a-been lonely at the hotel. I'm glad you come, but—" Mrs. Bradley took up her paddle and began to stir the contents of the pot. "I reckon, I ortter tell you, plain, Mis' Dawson, that John Westerfelt is stayin' with us. We've got plenty o' room fer you both, but I thought it mought not be exactly agreeable fer you."

A spiteful fire kindled in Mrs. Dawson's eyes.

"It mought upset *him* a little speck, Marthy, but *I* hain't done nothin' to be ashamed uv myse'f."

Mrs. Bradley went to the ash-hopper and filled a dipper with lye and poured it into the pot. Then she wiped her hands on her apron. "John Westerfelt's had enough trouble to kill a ordinary man, Mis' Dawson," she said, "an' I'm his friend to the backbone; ef you've got any ill-will agin 'im, don't mention it to me. Besides, now would be a good time fer you to show Christian forbearance. He's been thoughtless, but heer lately he is a changed man, an' I believe he's tryin' his level best to do right in God's sight. He's had a peck o' trouble in one way or another over heer, but, in addition to that, I'm mistaken ef he don't suffer in secret day and night."

"You don't say," cried Mrs. Dawson, eagerly. "I 'lowed he wus cuttin' a wide swath over heer."

"Never was a bigger mistake. He don't visit a single gal in the place. He neglects his business, an' spends most o' his time in the woods pretendin' to hunt, but he seldom fetches back a thing, and you know he used to be the best shot at the beef matches. Luke

thinks his mind is turned a little bit. Luke happened to go 'long the Shader Rock road t'other day an' seed John lyin' flat o' his back in the woods. He passed 'im twice inside of a hour, an' he hadn't moved a peg. No healthy minded man don't carry on that way, Mis' Dawson."

"Hain't he a-settin' up to that hotel gal?"

Mrs. Bradley turned towards the house with her guest. "No, he hain't," she answered. "She nussed him when he wus down, an'—well, maybe she does kinder fancy *him* a little —any natcherl girl would—I don't say she *does* nor *doesn't*, but he hain't been to see 'er, to my knowledge, a single time, nur has never tuk her out to any o' the parties. No, thar's nothin' twixt 'em; she tried to git 'im to come stay at the hotel when he wus sick atter the Whitecap outrage, an' I thought she acted a little for'ard then, but he refused an' come to us instead."

"You don't say so; why, I heerd—"

"A body kin always heer more about a thing fur off than right whar it happens," concluded Mrs. Bradley. They were now in the sitting-room, and Mrs. Dawson took off her bonnet and shawl. Mrs. Bradley put some pieces of pine under the smoulder-

ing logs in the fireplace and swept the hearth.

That night when Westerfelt came home supper was on the table. He was surprised to see the visitor, but she did not notice him and he said nothing to her. The meal passed awkwardly. Luke made an effort to keep up the conversation with her by asking about his friends in her neighborhood, but her replies were in a low tone and short, and he finally gave up the attempt.

Westerfelt rose from the table before any of the others and left the house. As he turned from the gate to go to the stable, he looked through the window and saw Mrs. Dawson move her chair to the fire. He paused and leaned against the fence. The firelight shone in the old woman's face; it was sad and careworn. Somehow she reminded him of his mother, as she had looked a short time before she died. He started on slowly, but came back again to the same spot. Luke wiped his mouth on the corner of the table-cloth, rose from the table, and went out at the back door. Westerfelt heard his merry whistle at the barn. Mrs. Bradley filled a large pan with dishes and took them into the kitchen. Mrs. Dawson bent over the fire. Something in the

curve of her back and the trembling way she held her hands to the blaze made him think again of his mother. He hesitated a moment, then, lifting the ring from the post, he pushed the gate open and went round the house and into the kitchen.

In a corner dimly lighted by a tallow-dip, and surrounded by pans, pots, and cooking utensils, Mrs. Bradley stood washing dishes. She turned when he entered.

"Why," she exclaimed, "I—I thought you'd gone; what are you comin' in the back way fer?"

"I've got something to say to—to her," he said, in a low tone. "I thought I'd ask you to stay out here for a minute—I won't be long."

She said nothing for a moment, but looked at him strangely, as she slowly dried her hands on a dish-towel. Then she burst out impulsively:

"John Westerfelt, ef Luke wusn't so particular 'bout my conduct with men, I'd kiss you smack dab in the mouth an' hug you; no wonder women make fools of the'rse'ves about you. Ef anybody ever dares agin to say anything agin yore character to me, I'll—"

She choked up, turned to the corner, and

dived into her dishpan, and he saw only her back. He went into the next room. Mrs. Dawson's dull glance was fixed on the coals under the logs. She started when she looked up and saw him behind her, and shrank from him in a pitiful blending of fright and questioning astonishment as he drew a chair near to hers and sat down.

"What do you want, man?" she asked, looking towards the kitchen door, as if she hoped Mrs. Bradley would appear.

"I want to talk to you, Mrs. Dawson," he said. "I don't want you to hate me any longer. I am awfully sorry for you; I did you a big injury, but I didn't do it on purpose. I did not dream it would end like it did. I have suffered over it night and day. It will stick to me the rest of my life."

The old woman was rapidly regaining her self-possession and with it her hatred of him; her eyes flashed in the firelight. The sad expression he had surprised on her face was gone.

"She's in 'er grave," she snarled. "Give 'er back an' I'll git down on my knees to you, as much as I hate you!"

"You know I'm helpless to undo what's been done," he said, regretfully.

"Well, take yorese'f out'n my sight then. You've made a' ol' woman perfectly miserable; go on an' marry, an' be happy, ef you kin."

"I never expect to be that. I've repented of my conduct a thousand times. I have suffered as much as God ought to make a man suffer for a wrong deed."

"Not as much as *me,* an' I hain't guilty o' no crime nuther."

"I've humbly begged your forgiveness. I can do no more." He rose slowly, despondently.

"Git out'n my sight, you vagabond!" Mrs. Dawson's voice rose till the last word ended in a shriek.

Footsteps were heard in the kitchen, the door opened, and Mrs. Bradley strode in, her face aflame. Westerfelt stepped towards her and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Don't say anything," he said; "for God's sake, pity her."

"I cayn't stand it," she blurted out, half crying; "she's gwine entirely too fur!" She pushed his hands down and stood glaring at Mrs. Dawson.

"Look a heer, Sue Dawson," she said, getting her breath fast, "yo're a older woman an' me, an' I've got due respect fer age an' a gray head, but John Westerfelt is my friend,

an' is a-visitin' of me 'n' Luke at present. You are welcome in my house ef you'll behave yorese'f decent, but you cayn't come under my roof to goad him to desperation. Now I've said my say. Thar's the door ef you dare open yore mouth agin. Thar ain't a speck o' Christian sperit in you. I'm ashamed to call you neighbor."

With an expression of mingled anger and fear in her face, Mrs. Dawson looked at her hostess, and without a word rose stiffly and went to the bed, on which lay her shawl, carpet-bag, and bonnet. Her face was to the wall as she drew her bonnet on and began to tie the strings.

"I'll go out the back way," whispered Westerfelt to Mrs. Bradley; "for God's sake, don't let her go!"

"All right," promised Mrs. Bradley; "go on. I'll make 'er stay, I reckon, but she's as stubborn as a mule."

He went through the kitchen, round the house, and out at the gate. He stopped, leaned against the fence, and watched the two women through the window. Mrs. Dawson had put on her shawl. She held her bag in front of her, and stood in the centre of the room. Mrs. Bradley leaned against the

mantel-piece. Their lips moved, and Mrs. Dawson was gesticulating furiously, but he could not hear their voices. Suddenly Mrs. Bradley took the bag from the old woman and put it on the bed. Then she untied Mrs. Dawson's bonnet-strings, took off the bonnet and shawl, and drew her back to the fire. They stood talking for a moment, then sat down together. Mrs. Bradley, holding the shawl and bonnet in her lap, put her arm round the old woman. Mrs. Dawson began fumbling in the pocket of her dress. She got out her handkerchief and held it to her face, then Mrs. Bradley began to wipe her own eyes on the corner of her apron.

"My God!" groaned Westerfelt, as he turned away, "this is more than I can bear!"

The next day was Sunday. It was as bright and balmy as spring. Westerfelt slept late. When he went in to breakfast Mrs. Bradley told him that Mrs. Dawson was out at the barn with Luke. They all intended to go to camp-meeting that day, she said. A revival had been going on at the meeting-house for the past week, and the congregation had increased so much that the little building would no longer hold the people. It had, therefore, been announced that the Sunday

service would be held at Stone Hill Campground, two miles from the village on the most picturesque of the Cohutta Valley roads.

As Westerfelt went down to the stable after breakfast he saw wagons, hacks, and old-fashioned carriages standing at nearly every gate on the street. Washburn and a colored boy, Jake, were at the stable busy washing and oiling the wheels of vehicles and currying horses.

"I wus jest about to send up to you," was Washburn's greeting. "Turnouts are at a premium to-day. I didn't know whether to let out yore own hoss an' buggy or not; two or three fellers that want to take the'r girls are offerin' any price fer some'n to ride in."

"I am going myself."

"Hossback ur buggy?"

"Buggy." Westerfelt turned suddenly and walked back towards the hotel. He had decided to invite Harriet Floyd to go to camp-meeting with him, let the consequences be what they might. He wanted to see her, and nothing should prevent it—not even Mrs. Dawson's presence in the village nor her threats.

As Westerfelt walked away Washburn said to himself: "It 'u'd be tough on 'im ef Bascom

Bates is ahead of 'im, after all his hangin' back. By George! I can't imagine who else Bates could 'a' intended to ask; he's give up goin' to Hansard's. I'll bet my hat Bates means business with Miss Harriet."

Westerfelt walked into the parlor of the hotel. A colored girl was sweeping the carpet and went out to tell Harriet that he wished to see her. Harriet didn't keep him waiting long. On rising she had dressed for church. She wore a pretty gray gown with a graceful bow of ribbon at her throat, and carried her cloak on her arm. She put it on the sofa as she entered. She was agitated, and he felt her hand quiver when he took it.

"I came to ask you to drive to the camp-ground with me," he said, as her hand slid out of his; "will you go?"

"Why—why," she stammered, "I—I—promised to go with Mr. Bates; I'm very sorry; if I had known—"

He glanced through the open door; his face had suddenly grown cold, hard, and suspicious. He was jealous even of a man she had never been with before. She sank into a chair and looked up at him helplessly, appealingly. She knew he was jealous, and in that proof of his love her heart went out to him.

"Oh, it don't matter," he said, quickly. "I'm going to drive out myself anyway, and I thought if you had nobody to take you, you might like to go 'long."

"He asked me yesterday," she faltered. Her voice was full of startled concern. "I'd rather go with you, you know I had. I have never gone with him anywhere. We are almost strangers. I—I would hardly know how to talk to him."

She knew it was not with his natural voice that Westerfelt answered. "Well," he said, coldly, "you can't go with two fellows, and he got to you first. I reckon Bates knows the roads; you'd better take the river-bottom route. Washburn says the other is not as good as it might be. Good-bye."

He had reached the veranda when she called him back. As he re-entered the room she rose and stepped towards him.

"Are you mad with me, Mr. Westerfelt?"

He was ashamed of himself, but he could not conquer his horrible humor. "Not in the least; I don't blame you." His tone was still cold and his glance averted. She put her handkerchief to her face in vexation, but removed it quickly as she caught his glance.

"I'll not go; I'll stay at home," she affirmed.

"No, go; you'd never hear the end of it if you were to slight Bates."

"Shall I see you out there?"

"I reckon not," he laughed, harshly. "I never want anybody bothering me when I take a girl anywhere, and I try to obey the Golden Rule with other men. You belong to Bates to-day." He left the room. She heard him stride across the veranda and walk hurriedly away. She went to the window and tried to catch another glimpse of him, but he was out of sight. She turned into the next room. Her mother was there packing some table linen into the bottom of a wardrobe.

"Mother," the girl faltered, "Mr. Westerfelt asked me just now to go to the camp-ground with him."

Mrs. Floyd let a table-cloth which she was folding hang down in front of her for a moment as she looked at Harriet. "Well, you told him you was going with Bascom Bates, didn't you?"

"Yes, of course, but—"

"Well, what of it? I wish you'd just look what a mess the rats have gone and made of this linen. They've been trying to gnaw the starch out of it, and have cut holes in nearly every piece."

"He looked mad, mother; he pretended he didn't care, but I never saw such a look on anybody's face. Oh, mother—"

"Harriet!" Mrs. Floyd looked straight into the girl's eyes as she closed the wardrobe door and turned the key. "Looky' here, I'm older than you, and I know men a sight better. Mr. Westerfelt is a nice man and a good enough catch, but he's got plenty of faults. You've just got to listen to reason. Some men will despise a girl quicker for letting themselves be run over than anything else, and he's one of that sort. He has deliberately insulted you by throwing up a delicate matter to you, which God knows you couldn't help, and now—well, he's a purty thing to dictate to you who you go with—"

"Mother, something was wrong with his mind when he said that," interrupted Harriet. "He's just gettin' well, that's all. Oh, mother, he loves me—I know he does—I know it! I'll bet he hardly remembers what he said. And now this old Bascom Bates has come between us."

Mrs. Floyd was moved, in spite of her desire to hold her ground.

"Yes," she admitted, "I think he acts like he loves you, and after staying away so long,

his wanting to go with you to-day looks powerful like he has come to his senses at last. But you will spoil it all if you slight another respectable man to please him. That's the long and short of it. Now, you take my advice and give him as good as he sends every time, and a little more to boot. It's a woman's right."

"Mother, you don't know Mr. Westerfelt; he—"

"La! yes, I do; they are every one p'int-blank alike. They want what they can't get, and what other men have, a sight more than what is in easy reach. If you've got any gumption, you'll make him think you are having a mighty good time with Bascom Bates to-day. If Bascom keeps coming to see you it will make him think all the more of you, too. Bates belongs to mighty nigh as good stock as he does anyway, and folks say he is the sharpest trader and note-shaver in the county. Ef you don't encourage him to come regular I shall do it for you. And if I ever get a chance I'll throw out a hint to Westerfelt that you have a little leaning towards the law anyway."

"I don't want you to do that, mother," objected Harriet, quite seriously.

Mrs. Floyd laughed slyly as she turned away. "You leave them two Jakes to me. I feel like I was a girl again. We used to have lots o' fun with Mr. Floyd, me 'n' mother did. Did I ever tell you the time me 'n' her—" But Harriet, with a preoccupied air, had turned away.

Chapter XVIII

WESTERFELT went back to the stable and ordered Jake to get out his horse and buggy. Washburn watched him over the back of the mule he was hitching to a spring wagon and smiled. "Got it in the neck that pop!" he murmured. "I knowed Bates wusn't a-buyin' a new whip an' lap-robe fer nothin'. I'll bet my life Mr. Westerfelt 'll lose that gal, an', by George, he ort to! He don't seem to know his own mind."

Just then Bascom Bates whirled by on his way to the hotel. There was something glaringly incongruous between his glistening silk hat and the long-haired "plough horse" and rickety buggy he was driving. The silk hat was a sort of badge of office; lawyers wore them, as a rule, and he was the only lawyer at Cartwright. He had bought his silk hat on the day of his admission to the bar, and had worn it regularly on dry Sundays ever since. It would have suited anybody else better than it did him. He was not at all

good-looking. His hair was stiff and rather red, his eyes were pale blue, his face was freckled, and the skin of his neck had a way of folding itself unattractively. He wore thick cow-leather shoes, which he never blacked, but greased frequently, and that made them catch and hold the dust. He never considered himself carefully dressed unless all the buttons of his vest were unfastened, except one at the top and one at the bottom. The gap between the two buttons was considered quite a touch of rural style. He held the reins, but a little negro boy sat on the seat beside him. He was taking the boy to hold his horse while he went into the hotel after Harriet. That, too, was considered quite the proper thing—a custom which had come down from slavery days—and as there was a scarcity of black boys in the village, Bates had brought his all the way from his father's plantation. The boy was expected to walk back home after the couple got started, but Bates intended to give him something for his trouble, and the distinction of holding Mr. Bates's horse in town was something the boy never expected to forget.

Bates had been a common farm-boy before he studied law, and the handles of ploughs, axes, and grubbing-hoes had enlarged the

joints of his fingers and hardened his palms. He had studied at night, earned a reputation as an off-hand speaker hard to be downed in debating societies, made a few speeches on the stump for willing gubernatorial candidates, and was now looked upon as a possible Democratic nominee for the Legislature. Most young lawyers in that part of the State were called "Colonel," and Bates had been addressed by the title once or twice.

Westerfelt pretended not to see him as he passed, but he urged Jake to hurry up and get out his horse and buggy. He had a strange idea that it would humiliate him in Harriet's eyes to be seen by her as she passed with a man he now regarded as a rival. He would have given much to have had any sort of companion with him. Jake had some difficulty in backing the horse into the shafts, and before Westerfelt could get started, he saw Harriet come out on the veranda and follow Bates to his buggy. However, Westerfelt managed to get started before they did, and drove on without looking back. Knowing that Bates was fond of fast driving, and fearing that he might overtake him, Westerfelt drove rapidly. The fires of jealousy were raging within him. He told himself that it would be a long time

before he would ask her again to go with him anywhere, and during that drive he almost convinced himself that he could give her up without much regret. He was sure Bates wanted to marry her. Such a stolid, matter-of-fact man would never visit a girl with less serious intentions. Bates, of course, was ignorant of the girl's early love for Wambush. He wondered if she would ever confess to the lawyer as she had to him. He thought it unlikely; for he had found it out and mentioned it to her first, and, besides, her experience with him had taught her discretion. Westerfelt would have been more generous in his estimation of her character had he been less jealous, and less angered by the disappointment of not being her escort. People driving slow teams looked at him curiously as he dashed past them. He had but one desire at that moment, and that was not to face Harriet and Bates together.

The road, near the camp-ground, went through a dense wood, and was so narrow that vehicles could not pass one another on it. In the narrowest part of this road Westerfelt was forced to stop. A wagon filled with women and children, and driven by old John Wambush, had halted in front of him.

"What's the matter?" Westerfelt called out to the old man, who had got down beside his horses and was peering at the motionless line of vehicles ahead.

"A hack's broke down," the old fellow replied. "Nobody hurt, it seems, but the banks on both sides is so steep that they cayn't cleer the road. We'll have to take our time. I'd jest about as soon set heer in my wagon as to listen to them long-winded preachers, anyway."

Westerfelt heard the beat of hoofs behind him. He was sure Bates and Harriet were approaching, but he dared not look around. Through the trees came the sound of singing from the camp-ground. The horse behind got nearer and nearer, till it stopped with its nose in the back part of Westerfelt's buggy. Westerfelt did not turn his head. He leaned over the dash-board and impatiently called out to old Wambush:

"How long are they going to keep us?"

"Tell kingdom come ur Gabriel blows his horn," laughed the old man, and all his family and the neighbors who were sharing the hospitality of his wagon joined in the laugh. It was a thing the old man would have said to anybody else and in the same tone, but it

irritated Westerfelt. The silence of the couple behind convinced him that it was Bates and Harriet, for men in love do not talk much. Mrs. Wambush turned her head and took off her gingham bonnet to get a good look at the man her son had tried twice to kill. Her features were so much like Toot's that Westerfelt, who had never seen her before, thought he had discovered the fountain-head of the young outlaw's villany. He glanced aside, but she continued to stare at him fixedly.

"How are you comin' on?" she asked him, slapping a little girl in a blue homespun dress who was about to fall out of the wagon.

"Pretty well, thank you," replied Westerfelt, coldly. He had detected a suggestion of a sneer about the old woman's lips.

"Cuts *is* a bad thing," she went on. "I reckon yore doctor bill run up to some more'n you'd 'a' lost that day by jest lettin' my boy have some'n to ride out home in."

"Dry up!" thundered old Wambush. He climbed back into his chair and glared at her. "Ef you dare open yore mouth agin, I'll make you git right out an' make tracks fer home." The old woman jerked on her bonnet and turned her face towards the horses.

Old Wambush looked over his shoulder at Westerfelt, a sheepish look on his face.

"Don't pay no 'tention to her," he apologized; "she's had the very old scratch in 'er ever since Toot was run off; I don't harbor no ill-will, but women ain't got no reason nohow. They never seem to know when peace is declared. It's the women that's keepin' up all the strife twixt North and South right now. Them that shouldered muskets an' fit an' lived on hard-tack don't want no more uv it."

Westerfelt said nothing.

"Hello thar!" The voice was from the buggy behind. Westerfelt turned. It was Frank Hansard with Jennie Wynn.

"Hello!" replied Westerfelt, greatly relieved.

"Whyn't you git down an' fight it out while we're waitin'?" jested Frank, in a low voice. "Anything 'u'd be better'n this; but I'll tell you, she's a regular wild-cat, if you don't know it."

Westerfelt smiled, but made no response. Beyond Hansard's buggy was another, and in it sat Harriet and Bates; there was no mistaking the old-fashioned silk hat and Harriet's gray dress. It seemed to Westerfelt that the blood in his veins stopped at the sight of the couple sitting so close together.

"Can you see who's behind us?" asked

Jennie, mischievously. "It's undoubtedly a case; they've been connoodlin' all the way an' didn't even have the politeness to speak to us as we passed 'em in the big road."

Westerfelt pretended not to hear. Old Wambush's wagon had started. The camp-ground was soon reached. As Westerfelt was hitching his horse to a tree, he could not help seeing Bates and Harriet in the bushes not far away. Bates was taking his horse out of the shafts and looping up the traces, and she stood looking on. Westerfelt knew that Jake or Washburn would attend to his horse, so he walked on to the spot where the service was to be held.

The camp-ground was in a level grove of pine-trees, between two steep hills. A space had been cleared in the centre of the grove and a long shed built. It was open at the sides and at one end, and filled with benches without backs. Straw was strewn in the aisles and between the benches. There was a platform at the closed end of the shed, and on it sat a number of preachers and elders of the church.

The crowd was large. Westerfelt stood for a moment in the phalanx of men surrounding the shed, and surreptitiously eyed Bates and Harriet. Her back was towards him as she stood, her cloak on her arm, still politely

watching her escort's movements. She looked so pretty, and there was such appealing grace in her posture. He saw Bates join her and take her arm, and then he watched them no longer. He knew they were coming, and he went in at the end of the shed and found a seat near the centre on the left. He saw Luke Bradley drive up and help his wife and Mrs. Dawson to alight, then Frank Hansard and Jennie Wynn came in and sat on the bench just behind him. Jennie was laughing in her handkerchief.

"There is old Mis' Henshaw," she whispered to Frank; "she's the'r regular stan'-by at shouting. When they begin to call up mourners she commences to clap 'er hands an' shout, then the rest get over their bashfulness an' the fun begins. We may see a lot of excitement if the town-people don't come and freeze 'em out with their finery an' stiff ways."

"You ort ter go up yorese'f, Jen," replied Frank; "you need it ef anybody does."

"I went up once," she laughed; "but Mary Trumbull pinched me an' tol' me to look at ol' Mis' Warlick's dress, right in front of us. It had split wide open between the shoulders an' all down the back. I thought I'd die laughin'. They all believed I was cryin',

and I got hugged by a whole string of exhorters."

"We'd better lie low," cautioned Frank; "last year, these camp-ground folks had some town-people indicted for disturbin' public worship, an' they had a lots o' trouble at court. They say they've determined to break up the fun that goes on here."

Westerfelt saw Luke Bradley and his party come in and sit down near the centre of the shed. He caught Mrs. Dawson's glance, but she quickly looked away. She had not forgiven him; that fact lay embedded in the sallow hardness of her face.

A moment later he forgot that Mrs. Dawson was in existence, for Harriet and Bates were coming in. Bates still clutched her arm and carried her cloak thrown over his shoulder. Westerfelt looked straight ahead at the platform, but he heard their feet rustling in the straw, and knew that they had sat down on the bench behind Hansard and Jennie. He overheard Bates, who could not possibly speak in a whisper, ask her in a mumbling bass voice if she wanted her cloak, and he saw the shadows of the couple on the ground as she stood up and allowed him to help her put it on.

Gradually the shed had filled to overflowing.

A white-haired preacher raised the tune of a familiar hymn, and the principal service of the day began.

After the sermon was over, the congregation rose to get their lunch-baskets, which had been left in their vehicles.

"Mighty poky business so far," Westerfelt heard Jennie Wynn say, as she and Hansard went out ahead of him; "wait until after dinner, they'll get limbered up by that time."

Westerfelt hoped Harriet and Bates would leave as soon as the others did, but he saw them standing between the benches as if waiting for some one. He looked straight ahead of him as he approached them, and was about to pass without looking in the direction, when Bates caught his arm and detained him.

"Miss Harriet wants to see you," he said, with a grin; "you wouldn't be in such a hurry if you knew what for."

"I want you to come to dinner with us," Harriet said, tremulously, leaning forward. "Jennie Wynn and I are going to put our baskets together, and Hyram Longtree and Sue Kirby are coming."

"I thank you," he said, "but I reckon I'll have to eat with Mrs. Bradley." He might have accepted the invitation if Bates had not

been grinning so complacently and looking at Harriet with such a large air of ownership.

"Oh, come on," urged Bates. "You get Bradley hash every day; there is some'n good in our basket; I could smell it all the way out here."

"I wish you *would* come," urged Harriet. "Mrs. Bradley will let you off."

There was something in her look and tone that convinced him that she had detected his jealousy and was sympathizing with him, and that in itself angered him.

"No, I thank you, not to-day," he said, coldly; "how did you like the preacher?"

"Very well," she replied, her face falling. "I have heard him before."

He had brought it on himself, but he was stung to the quick when she touched Bates's arm, smiled indifferently, and said: "I see Sue and Hyram out there waiting for us; we'd better go."

As Westerfelt walked on, overwhelmed with jealous rage, he heard her in the same tone ask Jennie Wynn to send Frank after her basket. Westerfelt edged his way through the crowd to Mrs. Bradley and Mrs. Dawson.

"Why," said Mrs. Bradley, "I 'lowed you'd

go off an' eat with some o' yore young friends. But we are glad you come."

"I never go back on home folks," he said, making an effort to speak lightly.

"Well, I fetched enough fer a dozen field-hands," laughed Mrs. Bradley. "Two young preachers have promised to eat with me; that's all I've axed. Luke, you go bring Brother Jones an' his friend, an' wait fer us out at the wagon."

"Why cayn't we fetch the dinner in heer an' not have to sit on the damp ground?" suggested Bradley.

"Beca'se, gumption! they won't have us greasin' up the benches that folks set on in the'r best duds," she retorted. "Besides, the pine straw will keep us off'n the ground, ef you ain't too lazy to rake it up."

Just then Harriet and her friends passed, and Westerfelt saw the girl looking inquiringly at Mrs. Dawson. He heard the old woman grunt contemptuously, and saw her toss her head and fiercely eye Harriet from head to foot as she went down the aisle.

Westerfelt shuddered. He wondered if the old woman could possibly know of Harriet's past connection with Wambush and her girlish infatuation. He turned away with Luke

to get the basket. Bradley was saying something about a suitable place to spread the lunch, but Westerfelt did not listen. He could think of nothing but the strange, defiant look in Mrs. Dawson's eyes as they fell on the girl he loved.

Chapter XIX

At luncheon Westerfelt sat next to Mrs. Bradley and could not see Mrs. Dawson, who was on the other side of her. Among the trees on his right, he had a good view of Harriet Floyd's party. They all seemed exasperatingly merry. Bates was making himself boyishly conspicuous, running after water, preparing lemonade, and passing it round to the others, with his silk hat poised on the back part of his head. Mrs. Bradley and her friends remained seated for some time after they had finished eating, and Westerfelt saw the young men in Harriet's party rise, leaving the girls to put the remains of the lunch into the baskets. Hyram and Frank strolled off together, and Bates, after a moment's hesitation, came straight over to Westerfelt.

"I want to talk to you, if you are through," he said, alternately pulling at a soiled kid glove on his hand and twisting his stubby mustache.

Westerfelt rose, conscious that Mrs. Dawson

was eying him, and walked down a little road through the pines. Neither spoke till they were out of sight of the crowd. Then Bates stopped suddenly and faced his companion. He put his foot on a fallen log, and cleared his throat. He looked up at the sky and slowly caressed his chin with his fingers, as Westerfelt had once seen him do in making a speech before the justice of the peace.

"We ain't well acquainted, Westerfelt," he began, stroking his chin downward and letting his lips meet with a clucking sound, also another professional habit; "but, you'd find, ef you knew me better, that I never beat the devil round the stump, as the feller said, an' I'm above board." He paused for a moment; then he kicked a rotten spot on the log with the broad heel of his brogan till it crumbled into dust. "I've got some'n to say to you of a sort o' confidential nature, an' ef you'll let me, I may ask you a point-blank question."

"Fire away," said Westerfelt, wonderingly.

"I'm not a ladies' man," continued Bates, with a kick at another soft spot on the log. "I'm jest a plain Cohutta Mountain, jack-leg lawyer. I've not been much of a hand to go to the shindigs the young folks have been gitting up about heer. One reason was I

couldn't afford it, another was I didn't have the time to spare, so I haven't never paid court to any special young lady in Cartwright. But now, I think I am in purty good shape to marry. I believe all young men ought to get 'em a wife, an' if I ever intend to do the like, I'll have to be about it, for I'm no spring chicken. Now, to make a long story short, I've taken a strong liking to the girl I fetched out here to-day, an', by George, now that I've got headed that way, I simply can't wait any longer, nor hold in either. I intend to ask her to be my wife if—" he began again to kick the log. "Dang it, it seems to me—you see, I know that she don't care a rap for Wambush; a few of us thought thar was something between 'em once, but since he went off it is as plain as day that she is not grieving after him. But, somehow, it seems to me that she may have a hankering after you. I don't know why I think so, but if thar is any understanding between you two I'd take it as a great favor if you'd let me know it, right now at the start. I'll wish you well—but I'd like to know it. It's a powerful big thing to me, Westerfelt—the biggest thing I ever tackled yet."

Westerfelt's face was hard and expressionless. He avoided the lawyer's searching

glance, shrugged his shoulders and smiled coldly.

"I am not engaged to her," he said, doggedly; "as far as I know she is free to—to choose for herself."

"Ah!" Bates slowly released his chin and caught his breath.

Westerfelt could have struck out the light that sprang into his eyes. "I hain't seen a bit of evidence in that line, I'll admit," went on Bates, with a chuckle of relief; "but some of the boys and girls seemed to think that something might have sprung up between you and her while you was laid up at the hotel. I reckon I was mistaken, but I thought she looked cut up considerable when you didn't come to dinner with us jest now. She wasn't lively like the rest."

"Pshaw!" said Westerfelt; "you are off the track."

"Well, no odds." Bates began to tug at his glove again. "I've come to you like a man an' made an open breast of it, as the feller said. I intend to ask her point-blank the very first time I get her alone again. The girl hain't give me the least bit of hope, but her mother has—a little. I reckon a feller might take it that way."

"What did Mrs. Floyd say?" Westerfelt started, and looked Bates straight in the eyes.

"Oh, nothing much; I may be a fool to think it meant anything, but this morning when I called for Miss Harriet the old lady came in and acted mighty friendly. She asked me to come to dinner with 'em next Sunday, and said Harriet always was backward about showing a preference for the young man she really liked, an' said she was shore I didn't care much for her or I'd come oftener."

Westerfelt was silent. He had never suspected Mrs. Floyd of scheming, but now that his suspicions were roused he let them run to the opposite extreme.

Yes, he thought, she was trying to marry her daughter off. Perhaps because she wanted her to forget Wambush, who was certainly a man no sensible woman would like to have in her family.

Bates's round red face appeared in a blur before him. Bates said something, but it sounded far off, and he did not catch its import. There was a long silence, and then the lawyer spoke again:

"What do you say? Why are you so devilish grum?" He took off his hat, and wiped his brow with a red bandanna. Westerfelt

stared into his face. He was unable to collect his senses. It was an awful moment for him. If he intended to marry her, and forget all, he must propose to her at once, or, urged by her mother, she might marry Bates and be lost to him forever. Bates caught his arm firmly.

"I'm no fool," he said, impatiently. "Dad burn it, you *do* love her. I see it! You are trying to throw me off the track! Look heer! If you've lied to me—" Voices were heard in the bushes up the road. Jennie Wynn and Harriet were approaching. "There they are now!" exclaimed Bates, in another tone; "you have not been open with me; for God's sake, don't keep me in suspense! Is she *yours?* Answer that!"

"I have never asked her." Westerfelt spoke through tight lips. "I've no claim on her."

"Well, then, it's as fair for one of us as the other." Bates was half angry. "We both want her; let's have it over with. Let's speak out now an' let her take her choice. If she takes you, you may drive her home; ef it's me—well, you bet it'll make a man of me. She is the finest girl on God's green earth. Here they come! What do you say?"

Westerfelt drew his arm from Bates's grasp,

and stared at him with eyes which seemed paralyzed.

"Don't mention me to her," he demanded, coldly. "I'll manage my own affairs."

"All right," Bates lowered his voice, for the two girls were now quite near; "you may be sure of your case, and I may be making a blamed fool of myself, but she's worth it."

"What are you two confabbin' about?" cried Jennie, in a merry voice. Neither of the men answered. Harriet looked curiously at them, her glance resting last and longer on the lawyer. That encouraged him to speak.

"I want to see you a minute, Miss Harriet,' he said, reaching out for her sunshade. "May I?"

"Certainly," she said, looking at him in slow surprise. She relinquished her umbrella, and they walked off together.

"What on earth is the matter with that man?" asked Jennie, her eyes on the receding couple; then she glanced at Westerfelt, and added, with a little giggle, "What's the matter with *you?*"

Westerfelt seemed not to hear.

"Mr. Bates looks like he's lost his best friend," went on the irrepressible girl. "Look

how he wabbles; he walks like he was following a plough in new ground. I wouldn't want him to swing my parasol about that way. What do you reckon ails him?"

"I don't know," said Westerfelt. Her words irritated him like the persistent buzzing of a mosquito.

"I wonder if that fellow is goose enough to go an' fall in love with Harriet."

"What if he should?" Westerfelt was interested.

"She hain't in love with him."

"How do you know?"

"How do I *know?* Because she is silly enough to be gone on a man that don't care a snap for her."

"Wambush?"

"No," scornfully; "*you,* that's who."

Westerfelt was silent for a moment, then he said: "How do you know I don't care for her?"

"You don't show it; you always stay away from her. They say you've been spoiled to death by girls over the mountain."

"I asked her to come out here with me today."

"Did you? You don't mean it! Well, I'll bet she—but I'm not goin' to tell you;

you are vain enough already." They were silent for several minutes after that. She seated herself on a log by the roadside, and he stood over her, his eyes on the pines behind which Bates and Harriet had disappeared. What could be keeping them so long? Jennie prattled on for half an hour, but he did not hear half she said. Afternoon service began. The preacher gave out the hymn in a solemn, monotonous voice, and the congregation sang it.

"We must be goin' purty soon," said Jennie; "my gracious, what is the matter with them people; hadn't we better go hunt 'em?"

"I think not, they—but there they are now."

Harriet and Bates had turned into the road from behind a clump of blackberry vines, and, with their heads hung down, were slowly approaching. Looking up and seeing Westerfelt and Jennie, they stopped, turned their faces aside, and continued talking.

Westerfelt was numb all over. Had she accepted Bates? He tried to read their faces, but even the open countenance of Bates revealed nothing.

"Come on, you ninnies!" Jennie cried out. "What on earth are you waiting for?"

Her voice jarred on Westerfelt. "Hush!

for God's sake, hush!" he commanded, sharply. "Let's go on—they don't want us!"

Wondering over his vehemence, Jennie rose quickly and followed him. He walked rapidly. She glanced over her shoulder at Harriet and Bates, but Westerfelt did not look back. When the shed was reached, Jennie asked him if he were going in with her, but he shook his head, and she entered alone. He remained in the crowd on the outside, pretending to be listening to the sermon, but was furtively watching the spot where, concealed by the trees, Bates and Harriet still lingered.

The preacher ended his discourse, started a hymn, and commenced to "call up mourners." Old Mrs. Henshaw began to pray aloud and clap her hands. The preacher came down from the platform, gave his hand to her, and she rose and began to shout. Then the excitement commenced. Others joined in the shouting and the uproar became deafening. It was a familiar scene to Westerfelt, but to-day it was all like a dream. He could not keep his eyes off the trees behind which he had left Harriet with his new rival. What could be keeping them?

Presently he saw them emerge from the woods. They were still walking slowly and

close together. Westerfelt could learn nothing from Harriet's passive face, but Bates now certainly looked depressed. A sudden thought stunned Westerfelt. Could she have told Bates of her old love for Wambush, and had he —even he—decided not to marry her? They passed the shed, went on to Bates's buggy, got into it, and drove down the road to Cartwright.

Chapter XX

THE religious excitement had spread over all the congregation. Every bench held some shouting or praying enthusiast. Some of the women began to move about on the outside, pleading with the bystanders to go forward for prayer. One of them spoke to Westerfelt, but he simply shook his head. Just then he noticed Mrs. Dawson sitting on the end of a bench next to the centre aisle. She had turned half round and was staring at him fixedly. When she caught his eye, she got up and came towards him. Other women were talking to men near him, and no one noticed her approach.

In the depths of her bonnet her withered face had never appeared so hard and unrelenting. She laid her hand on his arm and looked up into his eyes.

"Are you a seeker, John Westerfelt?" she asked, with a sneer.

"No, I am not." He tried to draw his arm away, but her bony fingers clutched and held it.

"They say the's a chance fer all to wipe out sins," she went on, "but I have my doubts 'bout you. You know whar you'll land. You kin mighty nigh feel the hot now, I reckon."

He caught her wrist and tore his arm from her grasp.

"Leave me alone!" he cried; then he dropped her wrist and added: "For Heaven sake don't—*don't* devil me to death; you make me forget you are a woman and not a beast—a snake! My God, let me alone!"

His angry tone had drawn the attention of a few of the bystanders. A tall, lank countryman, standing near Westerfelt, turned on him.

"Be ashamed o' yorese'f, young man," he said; "ef you don't want to be prayed fer you don't have to, but don't cut up any o' yore shines with these Christian women who are tryin' to do good."

"You don't know what you are talking about," replied Westerfelt, and he turned away quickly, and went across the cleared space to his horse and buggy. Jake, who was lying on the ground with some other negroes, ran forward and unfastened his horse, and gave him the reins.

"Want me to go back wid yer, Marse John?" he asked.

"No," answered Westerfelt, and he drove rapidly homeward. Reaching the stable, he put up his horse, and went to the room over the office. He sat down, took up an old newspaper, and tried to read it, but there seemed to be something in the paling light on the bare fields outside and the stillness of the empty building that oppressed him. He rose and looked out of the window. Not a soul was in sight. The store and the bar, with their closed shutters, looked as if they had not been opened for a century. A brindled cow stood in the middle of the street, jangling a discordant bell, and lowing dolefully. He rose, went down-stairs, walked aimlessly about in the stable, and then went up the street towards Bradley's. He wondered if Harriet had returned, but as he passed the hotel he had not the courage to look in.

Every door of the Bradley house was closed. He tried all the windows, but they were held down by sticks placed over the sashes on the inside. Even the chickens and ducks in the back yard seemed to have fallen under the spell of the unwonted silence. The scare-crow in the cornfield beyond the staked-and-ridered rail fence looked like the corpse of a human being flattened against the yellow sky.

He went out at the gate and turned up the Hawkbill road till he was high enough to see the village street above the trees. Later he noticed the vehicles beginning to come back from the camp-ground, and he returned home by a short path through the fields. He reached the Bradleys' just as Luke was helping his wife out of the spring-wagon at the gate.

"We didn't fetch Mis' Dawson back," explained Mrs. Bradley. "She met some old acquaintances—the Hambrights—an' they made 'er go home with 'em. Lawsy me, haven't I got a lots to tell you, though! You had as well prepare fer a big surprise. You couldn't guess what tuk place out thar atter you left ef you made a thousand dabs at it. Luke, go put up the hoss. I want to talk to John, an' I don't want you to bother us tell I'm through, nuther. You kin find plenty to do out at the barn fer a few minutes."

Westerfelt followed her into the sitting-room and helped her kindle the fire in the big chimney.

"Well, what has happened?" he asked, when the red flames were rolling up from the heap of split pine under the logs.

"It's about Mis' Dawson," announced Mrs. Bradley, as she sank into a big chair and

began to unpin her shawl. "She's got religion!"

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, an' I'm what give it to her—*me*, an' nobody else. I'm a purty thing to be talkin' that way, but it's the livin' truth. I caused it. When I seed her git up an' go acrost to you and drive you clean off, I got so mad I could a-choked her. I wus sittin' by Brother Tim Mitchell. You don't know 'im, I reckon, but he's the biggest bull-dog preacher 'at ever give out a hymn. He's a ugly customer, not more'n thirty, but he's consecrated, an' had ruther rake a sinner over the coals of repentance 'an eat fried chicken, an' he's a Methodist preacher, too. He's nearly six foot an' a half high an' as slim as a splinter; he lets his hair run long an' curls it some. He's as dark as a Spaniard, an' his face shines like he eats too much grease an' sweats it out through the pores uv his skin.

"Well, he seed me a-lookin' at Mis' Dawson, when she went to devil you, an' he bent over to me an' sez he: 'Sister Bradley, what ails that woman anyhow?'

"'What ails her?' sez I. 'What'd you ax that fer, Brother Tim?'

"'She don't do nat'ral,' sez he. 'I've been

talkin' to 'er about 'er speritual welfare ever sence I set down heer, an' she won't say one word. She ain't a bit like the gineral run o' old women; an' what's more, she hain't doin' one bit o' exhortin' that I kin see. I don't know whether she's in the vineyard or not.'

"Then, John Westerfelt, I jest come out an' tol' 'im about 'er. Of course I never give no names; but I made 'im see what ailed her, an' I never seed a man look so interested. 'Sister Bradley,' sez he, rubbin' his hands, when I got through, 'I'm going to wade in an' get hold o' that woman's soul.'

"'Well,' sez I, 'you may have to wade purty fur an' dive consider'ble, fer she's about the toughest snag you ever struck.'

"'I'm a-goin' to have 'er *soul*,' sez he, an' he laughed. 'I'd ruther make that sort of a struggle for the Lord 'an to put out a burnin' house, ur keep a pizen snake frum bitin' a baby. You watch my smoke. Is she a-comin' back heer?'

"'I kin bring 'er back,' sez I, 'fer right this minute I'd ruther see that woman a shoutin' convert 'n to have a meal sack full o' gold dollars.'

"'Well,' sez he, sorter jokin' like, 'you

fetch 'er heer an' set 'er down whar she wus a minute ago, an' I'll put a plaster on 'er back that'll make 'er *think* she's shoutin' whether she is or not.'

"Well, I went to whar she was outside an' tol' 'er Brother Mitchell wanted to see 'er. 'I jest ain't a-goin' a step,' sez she, 'so I ain't,' an' she looked sorter suspicious.

"'Well, I don't railly see how yo're goin' to help yorese'f, Mis' Dawson,' sez I. 'Goodness knows yo're showin' mighty little int'rust in the meetin' anyways. Looks like you wouldn't insult one of the most saintly men we got by turnin' yore back on 'im. Mebby he wants to ax about startin' a meetin' over yore way. You'd better go.'

"That settled it; I took 'er back an' set 'er down by him, an' he begun to git in his work. I never knowed a man called to preach could be so mealy-mouthed. He begun—you see I was next to him an' could ketch ev'ry word, although thar was jest a regular hullabaloo o' shoutin' an' singin' goin' on all about—he begun by goin' over his own family trouble, an' I wanted to laugh out, fer the Lord knows, while Brother Tim's folks has had *some* few ordinary reverses, an' *did* lose a few head o' stock in the war, an' one o' the gals married a no-

'count Yankee carpenter an' never would write back home, an' Brother Mitchell's ma an' pa died uv ripe old age—but, as I say, nobody ever thought they wus particular unfortunate. Howsomever, she thought they wus from his tale an' his sad, mournful way o' talkin'. Job an' all he went through, b'iles an' all, wasn't a circumstance, an' it was all the Lord's doin's, Brother Tim said, to show him the true light. I seed she was listenin' an' that he had hold uv 'er some, but I kinder thought she wusn't as easy prey as he 'lowed, fer he broke down once in awhile an' had a sort o' sickly, quivery look about the mouth. All at once he turned to me as mad as a hornet. Sez he: 'It's that dern bonnet,'—no, he didn't say that exactly. I heer Luke say them things so much 'at his words slip in when I'm in a hurry—'it's that bonnet o' her'n, Sister Bradley,' sez he. 'I'll never git 'er in a wearin' way as long as that poke keeps bobbin' up an' down twixt me 'n her eyes. Cayn't you manage to git it off?'

"Well, you kin imagine that wus a difficult thing to do, but I reckon the Lord o' Hosts must 'a' been with us, fer all at once a idee come to me an' I jest leaned over to her. 'Sister Dawson,' sez I, 'I beg yore pardon, but the skirt o' yore bonnet is ripped, le'me see it

a minute,' an', la me! Brother Mitchell's eyes fairly danced in his head. I heerd him laugh out sudden an' then he kivered his mouth 'ith his long, bony hand an' coughed as I snatched the bonnet frum 'er head an' begun to tear a seam open. She made a grab over his spindlin' legs fer it, but I paid no attention to 'er, pretendin' to be fixin' it. Then the fun begun. I seed 'im lay hold of 'er wrists an' look 'er spank, dab in the eyes, an' 'en he begun to rant. Purty soon I seed her back limberin' up an' I knowed, as the sayin' is, that she was our meat. All at once, still a-hold o' 'er hands, he turned to me, an' sez he: 'Go ax Brother Quagmire to sing "How firm a foundation" three times, with the second an' last verse left out, an' tell 'im to foller that up with "Jesus, Lover." Git 'im to walk up an' down this aisle—this un, remember. Tell 'im I've got a case heer wuth more 'n a whole bench full o' them scrubs 'at'll backslide as soon as meetin' 's over; tell 'im to whoop 'em up. Sister Bradley, you are addin' more feathers to yore wings right now 'an you ever sprouted in one day o' the Lord's labor. But, for all you do, hold on to that blasted devil's contraption.' He meant the bonnet.

"I slid out 'twixt the benches on one side, an'

went round to the stand an' spoke to Brother Quagmire, who wus leadin'; he's the big, white-headed man they say looks like Moody an' has the scalps o' more sinners in 'is belt than any man on the war-path. When I tol' 'im what wus up, he giggled an' said, 'God bless 'im, Mitch is a wheel-hoss!' an' with that he busted out singin' 'How firm a foundation, ye saints o' the Lord,' an' he waved his hands up an' down like a buzzard's wings, an' went up our aisle, a-clappin' an' singin' to beat the Dutch. I never seed the like before. I wusn't cryin' fer the same reason 'at the rest of 'em wus, but the tears wus jest a-streamin' down my face like a leaky well-bucket, fer I believed the thing wus goin' to work, an' I wus thinkin' how glad you'd be. She looked up an' seed my face an' busted out cryin'. Then Brother Mitchell ketched 'er up in his arms an' yelled: 'You little, ol', triflin' thing, I'm a-gwine to put you in the arms o' yore Redeemer,' an' then I jest couldn't help cryin'. Luke seed me give way an' sneeked off to water the hosses. John, she was the happiest creetur God ever made. She laid 'er old bare head in my lap an' cried like a baby. I never railly loved 'er before, but I did then. Somehow she seemed to be my own mother come back to life ag'in. But

she didn't shout an' take on like the rest. She jest cried an' cried an' had the youngest look on 'er face I ever seed on a ol' person. Once she said, sez she, 'I'm goin' back to put a grave-rock over Jasper's remains,' an' then I remembered folks said she wus too stingy to do that when Dawson died. She looked like she wanted to talk about you, but I didn't feel called on to fetch up the subject. After awhile she went out to the wagon whar her carpet-bag wus, an' got up in one o' the cheers an' begun to stitch on some'n. I wus puzzled right sharp, fer it wus a Sunday, an' it looked like a funny thing fer a body to do, but atter awhile she come to me with some'n wrapped up in a paper—I'll show it to you in a minute —an' give it to me. It was a pair uv her best knit wool socks. You know some old women think it's a mark o' great respect to give a pair o' socks to anybody that they've knit the'rselves.

"'I want you to take the socks,' sez she, 'an' give 'em to the right person,' sez she, awful bashful like. You know, John, I don't believe all the religion this side o' the burnin' lake kin make some folks beg a body's pardon, not ef they wanted to wuss than anything on earth. She is one o' that sort. I 'lowed right off 'at the socks wus fer you an' started

to tell 'er how glad you'd be to git 'em when, all at once, I noticed a letter M worked in red wool on 'em. It was a letter M as plain as anything could be, a big letter M, an' that throwed me. Then I thought about Brother Mitchell's name beginnin' with a M, an' so I said, sez I, 'So you want me to give 'em to Brother Mitchell, do you?' An' 'en she flared up. 'Who said a word about Brother Mitchell?' she axed. I seed she wusn't pleased by my mistake, an' so I tried my level best to think o' somebody else with a M to his name, but I couldn't to save my neck, so at last I give it up. 'Yo're entirely too mysterious fer me, Mis' Dawson,' sez I. 'I can't, fer the life o' me, think uv one soul you know whose name begins with a M.' 'M,' sez she, 'who said that was a letter M? Yo're jest a-puttin' on. You know that ain't no M.'

"'That's what it is,' sez I. 'I haven't waited till I'm old enough to have gran'children to l'arn my a b c's.'

"She snatched the socks frum me, an' I 'lowed she wus goin' to throw 'em away, but she turned 'em upside down an' helt 'em before my eyes. 'Do you call that a M?' sez she, an' shore 'nough it was as plain a W as I ever laid eyes on.

"'Oh!' sez I, 'now I see. Do you want me to give 'em to John Westerfelt?'

"But she wouldn't say narry a word. I seed how the land lay, fer I knowed she'd ruther die, religion ur no religion, 'an come right out in so many words an' say she wus sorry. You know I believe as I'm a-settin' heer 'at thar'll be folks meetin' on the golden sands of eternity, by the River of Life, 'at'll pass one another with the'r noses in the air; but I'll take that back. I reckon thar won't be no noses, nur no air, as fer that matter; folks that's read up on sech matters says ever'thing will be different. The Lord knows I hope it will be. I want a change. But I am gettin' away frum Mis' Dawson. Then I up an' told 'er p'int-blank I wus goin' to give the socks to you with the compliments of the day, an' ef she objected she'd better put in 'er complaint in time, but she jest walked back an' set down in front o' the stand. John, she's that sorry fer all she's said and done 'at she can't talk about it. These heer socks is all the proof you need. I don't think she wants to meet you face to face nuther. She's goin' home in the mornin' in Sam Hambright's wagon. Lord! Peter Slogan an' his wife never 'll know what to make uv 'er. I'd give a purty to be

thar when she comes, fer they won't know she's converted, an' she'd be strung up by the toes ruther 'n tell 'em right out."

Mrs. Bradley stood up, and then quickly sat down again. "I thought I'd get them socks out'n the dinner-basket, but I heer Luke a-comin'. He's like a fish out o' water. He seed me a-takin' on with Mis' Dawson, an' he thinks I've got a fresh dose o' religion. I didn't let 'im know no better, an' he wus grum all the way home. He can't put up with a Christian of the excitable sort. Hush, don't say a word; watch me devil him, but ef you don't keep a straight face I'll bust out laughin'. Lordy, I feel good somehow—I reckon it's beca'se yo're shet o' that old woman's persecutions."

Just then Bradley entered and laid his hat on the bed. Westerfelt now noticed the unsettled expression of his face and smiled as he thought of the innocent cause of it.

"Well," said Bradley, "are you through with John? It's high time we wus havin' some'n t' eat."

"Yes," said his wife, with a doleful expression of countenance, "I reckon I'm through with him. Set down in that cheér, Luke. I've been talkin' to John about his speritual

welfare, an' it's yore time now. We've got to turn over a new leaf, Luke—me 'n' you has; we've jest gone fur enough in iniquity —that is, *you* have; I've meant well enough all along."

"I say!" Luke sat down uneasily and glanced at Westerfelt, who sat staring at him with an assumed look of seriousness which threatened to go to pieces at any instant.

"Yes, Luke," went on his wife, "you've been my mill-rock long enough, an' now I'm goin' to take a new an' a firmer stand in my treatment uv you. We used to hold family prayer an' ax the blessin', an' now our house has got to be called the dancin'-door to perdition; we've got to quit all that. I'm a-goin' to smash that jug o' bug-juice o' yo'r'n in the closet, an' not another speck o' the vile truck shall come in my house." (She caught Westerfelt's eye, drew down the side of her face which was next to him, and winked slyly.)

"Oh, you are!" Bradley was a picture of absolute misery. He crossed his legs and then put his feet side by side, only to cross and recross his legs again.

"I've had a great awakenin' to-day, Luke," she went on, "an' now I see nothin' ahead o'

me but one solid blaze o' glory. John heer is convicted, an' is goin' to do the right thing, but I reckon he won't have as much to undo as you who are older in wrong livin'. That cow you traded fer with Fred Wade has to go back early in the mornin'. You knowed the one you swapped wus mighty nigh dry, an' 'at his'n come home every night with 'er bag so loaded she could hardly take a step without trippin' up — the fust thing in the mornin', mind you! I want you to git the Book right now, too, an' read some, an' let's begin family worship. Thar it is on the sewin'-machine; I'll bet you ain't looked in it in a month o' Sundays."

Westerfelt was laboriously keeping a straight face, but it was waxing red as blood and his eyes were protruding from their sockets and twinkling with a merriment that was a delight to Mrs. Bradley, who kept glancing at him as she talked.

"What in the dev—what do you mean, Marthy?" Bradley stammered. "The cow kin go back, ef you say so, but blame — but I'll draw a line at home prayin'. I ain't fittin', that's all; I ain't fittin'."

"I know that as well as you do"—Mrs. Bradley wiped a smile from her face and winked

at Westerfelt — "but this blessed Sabbath is a good time to begin. Git the Book, Luke!"

"I'll not *do* it, Marthy; you may shout an' carry on as much as you like, with yore sudden religious spurts, but I believe in regularity, one way ur the other."

"Git that Book, Luke Bradley; git it, I say," and then Westerfelt's laughter burst from him, and he laughed so heartily that an inkling of the truth seemed forced on Bradley, who had witnessed his wife's practical joking before.

"I believe, on my soul, it's a sell," he said, in a tone of vast relief. "Lord, I 'lowed you'd gone plumb crazy."

And then he was sure it was a joke, for Mrs. Bradley had her head between her fat knees, and was laughing as he had never heard her laugh before.

"I paid you back, you ol' goose," she said, when she could master her merriment. "You had no business thinkin' I'd lost my senses, jest beca'se I cried when 'at ol' woman got so happy. I was glad on John's account, but you don't know a bit more now than you did. You couldn't see a wart on yore nose ef you wus cross-eyed."

Chapter XXI

MRS. DAWSON reached home the next day about four o'clock in the afternoon. Mrs. Slogan was seated at her great cumbersome hand-made loom in the corner of the kitchen, weaving reddish brown jeans for Peter's clothing. Mrs. Lithicum and her husband were in paying a visit. The latter and Slogan were talking over a joint hog-killing they were going to have to save labor and expense. Peter had put a higher mental valuation on the labor saved than Lithicum. He had discovered, on a former occasion, that the arrangement had saved him some money, and that Ab had done all the work, such as directing the black hands and keeping the water just the proper temperature to remove the bristles without "setting" them.

"You see," Peter had remarked to his wife, "Ab works more'n I do; mebby it's beca'se he's a chawin' man—a smokin' man has to set down to smoke to do any good, while a chawin'

man kin use both hands at any job, an' jest squirt when an' whar he wants to."

Peter went to a window, while Ab was watching the movement of the loom, and looked across the fields. Suddenly the others heard him utter an ejaculation of profound astonishment. The loom ceased its monotonous thumping, and all eyes turned on him.

"What's the matter?" asked Mrs. Lithicum, her round, red face full of curiosity.

"I'll bet narry one o' you could make a good guess."

They knew him too well to expect information from him, so they all started for the window. Mrs. Lithicum reached it first. "As I'm alive!" she cried. "Mis' Dawson's got back. She's gettin' out uv a wagon down at 'er cabin."

"Well, I 'lowed she wouldn't always be gallivantin' about heer and yan," said the weaver, as she peered over the shoulder of her guest. "I reckon they've all got tired of 'er over thar an' sent 'er home."

Mrs. Lithicum followed the speaker back to the loom. "Well, I don't know but I'm a leetle grain sorry," she said.

"Sorry!" repeated the sister of the person under discussion. "I don't see what thar railly is to be sorry about."

Mrs. Lithicum looked as if she had got her foot into it, and she flushed, but she had her defence ready. "Well, you see, Mis' Slogan, she's tuck a most unaccountable dislike to Lizzie, an' a pusson like—well, some *do* think her trouble has sorter turned 'er brain, an' the's no rail tellin' what quar notion may strike 'er."

"Do you think so, Mis' Lithicum?" Mrs. Slogan retained the big smooth shuttle in her hand and eyed the speaker anxiously, her eyelids quivering.

"To be downright plain, yes, I do, Mis' Slogan, ef she *is* yore sister, an' I've thought many a time 'at ef I wus in yore place I wouldn't feel safe nuther. They say a pusson sometimes gits softenin' o' the brain frum hatin' folks an' livin' alone like she does. I'd be afeerd to leave the house open at night ef I wus you."

"Well!" suddenly broke in Peter, who was the only one remaining at the window. "You may have my overcoat an'"—after a pause—"my best Sunday shirt, too, ef she hain't loaded 'er bed in that wagon an' 's a-comin' this way as big as the side of a house. She's comin' back heer, Clariss, Lordy, Lordy!"

They all ran to the window again and stood

breathlessly watching the oncoming wagon. "She's off 'er nut now, I know," said Peter. "I know 'er too well; she never would come back heer ef she wus in 'er right mind."

"Well, I don't want to meet 'er—that's one thing certain," cried Mrs. Lithicum in sudden terror. "She mought pounce upon me on Lizzie's account. I'm a-goin' home by the path through the cotton-patch. Good day to all uv you. Ef I was you-uns," she called back from the door, "I'd have 'er put up!"

Abner mutely followed her, and the Slogans were left to solve the problem for themselves. The wagon drew up at the door, and from their window they saw the little woman step down over the front wheel and direct the white driver —they could not hear her voice, but they read the signs of her hands—to put the few pieces of furniture on the porch. This done, the wagon clattered away, and Mrs. Dawson, with hanging head, came into the passage and went to her old room.

"What in the name o' goodness do you reckon she's goin' to do?" gasped Mrs. Slogan, quite pale and cold. "I'm nearly skeerd to death."

"She's got a faint idee 'at she's goin' to

put up heer with us," answered Peter with considerable concern for a man of his phlegmatic temperament. "They say crazy folks jest natcherly drift back into the'r old ruts, an' the best way is to let 'em alone. Ef she kin feed 'erself we'll be in luck; some crazy folks jest gaum the'rselves from head to foot an' have to have constant attention."

"But you ain't a-goin' to let 'er stay, are you?" cried his wife.

Peter smiled grimly and went to the mantelpiece for his foul-smelling comforter. He also pulled down from a nail on the wall a dry stalk of tobacco and proceeded to crush and crumble some of the crisp leaves in his big palm.

"Me? I don't see 'at I've got a thing to say in the matter," he retorted, with a grimace that bore a slight resemblance to a smile. "You wus tellin' me jest t'other day 'at the lan' an' house wus in yore name an' her'n, an' 'at I had no right to put in. I reckon you'll have to manage 'er, Clariss."

Mrs. Slogan sank back on the bench of the loom, but she didn't set the thing in motion; she had an idea that the slightest sound might draw the attention of the bustling inmate of the room across the passage, and just then she was not prepared to exchange greetings.

Peter stood at the window, his head now enveloped in smoke, and kept peering out at the porch from which Mrs. Dawson was moving the various articles pertaining to her bed, such as slats, posts, railings, mattress, pillows, sheets, and coverings.

"She's as busy as a hoss's tail in fly-time," he observed. "Oh, Lawsy mercy!"

This last ejaculation came out with such startled emphasis that his wife let her mouth fall open as she waited for him to explain. But Peter only stretched his neck towards the window, holding his pipe behind him to keep from setting fire to the curtain.

"Oh, Peter, what is it?"

"She hain't fetched a sign of a thing to cook with," he replied. "I kinder thought I heerd a clatter in that wagon as it driv' off; she's give 'er coffee-pot an' fryin'-pan an' dishes to the feller that fetched 'er over heer an' moved 'er things. She intends to eat with us."

Mrs. Slogan wrung her hands. "Something jest has to be done," she said, "an' the Lord knows I don't know what it is. Do you reckon she's dangerous, Peter?"

"She's yore sister, Clariss," he chuckled, in spite of the gravity of the situation, "an'

I'd hate to be in yore re'ch ef you wus to lose any more uv yore mind. As it is, you—"

"I wish you'd shet up!" broke in his wife; "this ain't no time fer foolishness."

Then they drew their chairs up to the fireplace and sat down. They could still hear the old woman moving about, setting things to rights in her room. Suddenly there was a great clatter of falling slats. The bed had come down.

"She can't put that thing up by 'erself," suggested Peter. "Go in an' he'p 'er."

"I'll do no sech a thing; do you reckon I want 'er to scratch my eyes out? Huh! She hates me like a rattlesnake, an' has jest come heer so she kin devil me to death. I see it now. She seed she wusn't worryin' me much over thar in 'er ol' cabin, an' she's jest bent on gittin' nigher."

"I reckon that's jest yore—yore conscience a-talkin'," opined Slogan. "Thar's no gittin' round it, Clariss, you did sorter rub it in when Sally wus alive. I often used to wonder how the old creetur managed to put up with it; you kept ding-dongin' at 'er frum mornin' to night. Ef she's cracked, yo're purty apt to have it read out to you frum the Book o' Judgment."

Mrs. Slogan must have felt the truth of this accusation, for she voiced no denial. The room across the passage suddenly became quiet. It was evident that the bed was up; as a further evidence of this, Mrs. Dawson was seen to go out to the wood-pile and fill her apron with chips and return with them.

"She's got located," remarked Slogan. "She's a-goin' to set in now an' make 'erse'f comfortable."

"She'll burn the house down over our heads," whined Mrs. Slogan. "Oh, Peter, I'm not satisfied! I'm anything but."

The sun went down and night came on. Mrs. Slogan began to prepare supper, casting, the while, frequent glances at the door opening on the passage. Peter smoked pipe after pipe without being able to come to any definite conclusion as to how to surmount the difficulty. Suddenly he looked over his shoulder and tapped the heel of his shoe with his pipe.

"You'd better cook enough fer three," was what he said, "an' make more coffee. Ef she don't he'p us drink it, we'll need it to keep us company through the night. I know in reason 'at you won't close yore eyes till—till we see some way out of the difficulty."

"Peter Slogan," said his wife, in a whisper, as she laid the table-cloth down in a chair and leaned over him, "you skeer the life out o' me when you talk that away. I never seed you look like you minded anything before."

"I'm glad I show some'n'," he grinned, struggling back into his old sardonic mood. "I 'lowed I'd got too hardened to feer man, God, ha'nt, ur devil. Well, I *don't* keer overly much about havin' a crazy creetur' so nigh me, an' I ain't a-goin' to, ef I kin see any way out of it. We ain't a thousand miles from the State asylum."

Mrs. Slogan moved noiselessly as she unfolded the cloth and spread it. She put the coffee on the table and poured the floating grounds from the top into a tin cup.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she proposed, timidly. "I'll fix 'er some supper on that piece o' plank thar, an' a big cup o' coffee sweetened jest like she used to like it, ef—" She hesitated.

"Ef what? Out with it!"

"Ef you'll take it in thar whar she's at."

Peter deliberated and cleared his throat.

"She's *yore* sister," he got out, finally, "an' the last time I went to 'er cabin she wouldn't listen to me no more 'n ef I wus a

rat a-squeakin'. You see, a feller's sorter expected to—"

"I don't keer ef she *is* my sister, I ain't a-goin' in thar, an' that settles it. I declare I'd be ashamed to call myse'f a man ef I wus afeerd uv a weakly, bent-over old woman like she is."

Peter stirred uneasily in his chair.

"I don't keer about holdin' no talk with 'er—ur startin' 'er off by the sight o' me—but I'll go thar—I see 'er door ain't shet—an' I'll put the grub whar she'll see it."

"Well, that'll do," agreed Mrs. Slogan. "Feedin' 'er ain't a-goin' to make 'er any wuss, an' it mought have a quietin' effect."

Peter took the improvised tray when it was brought to him and went out with it, returning in a moment.

"I ketched 'er a-lookin' right at me," he said, "an' so I jest walked bold-faced in an' put the stuff on a table in front of 'er. She looked down in the fire an' didn't speak, an' I didn't nuther. She didn't look one bit dangerous. Now that I've seed 'er, I reckon I'll sleep some. I'm dern glad I did. Ef you'll jest take a peep at 'er you'll feel better."

"Well, I won't close my two eyes," affirmed his wife. "I hain't seed 'er, nur I don't intend to, ef I kin git out of it."

When supper was ready they softly moved their chairs to their places and sat down. Mrs. Slogan didn't eat heartily, but Peter's appetite seemed normal. They had finished eating, Peter had secured his toothpick from the broom, and they had moved back to the fireplace, when they heard a stealthy step on the passage floor near the door. The bolt was turned, the door shutter creaked and moved a few inches. A hand came in sight, and something wrapped in brown paper was tossed into the centre of the room. Then the steps receded, and they heard the widow resume her chair.

Peter rose curiously and picked up the parcel, and bringing it to the fire opened it. Its contents were a pair of woollen socks and a pair of stockings of the same material. On the first had been worked a big red letter "P" and on the other a capital "C."

"Did you ever?" gasped Mrs. Slogan. "I don't believe she's a bit more crazy 'n I am."

"I never 'lowed she wus," said Peter, with a laugh. "I jest thought she mought be harder to manage 'an you, that's all."

"Sister's gone an' had a change o' heart!" declared Mrs. Slogan, ignoring his joke. "Nothin' else could a-made 'er come back an' give us

these things. I heerd they had a big revival over thar. Oh, Lordy, I do feel so relieved!"

"Well, I reckon we mought as well go in an' pay 'er our respects an' git started," grumbled Peter. "I'm not a-goin' to tote 'er meals about, I'll tell you that. Slavery day is over."

"No, we'll jest let 'er alone," Mrs. Slogan beamed; "she'll know we mean all right by the supper, an' I reckon she'll move up 'er cheer in the mornin'; ef she don't, I'll blow the field-horn."

Peter lighted another pipe. "I wonder," said he, "how long it'll be 'fore you an' her 'll be clawin' agin. Religion ur no religion, crazy ur no crazy, women is jest the same."

Chapter XXII

WHEN Westerfelt went to bed that night after his talk with Mrs. Bradley about the conversion of Mrs. Dawson, it was with a certain lightness of heart and buoyancy of spirits that he had not experienced for a long time. He did not know exactly how his new feeling would show itself in regard to Harriet, but he believed he might, in time, cease to look upon her love for Wambush as such an unpardonable offence. "Surely," he argued, "if Mrs. Dawson can forgive me for all I have done, I ought to pardon the girl I love for what she did before she knew me."

These were admirable intentions, but he was counting on a depth of nature that was not his either by inheritance or cultivation. The inflammable material was still bound up in his breast, and it needed but one spark to fire it. What he was struggling against had come down to him from a long line of ancestors, men who would rather have died than brook the thought of a rival, especially in an inferior; men who

would have spurned the love of their hearts if it were stained with falsehood under any circumstances, and when, as it was in Westerfelt's case, the provocation was not only deceit, but ardent love for such a man—ah, there was the rub!

The next morning he watched Bates's office from the stable till he saw the lawyer come down the street and enter. He waited awhile longer, for he saw Bates go out to the wood-pile and return with an armful of wood. Presently blue smoke began to rise from the chimney, and Westerfelt went over and rapped on the door.

"Come in!" Bates called out. Westerfelt found him with his back to the door, sitting over the fire, a leather-bound tome in his lap.

"Hello!" he cried, seeing who it was; "pull up a seat."

Westerfelt drew a rickety chair from beneath a dusty desk and sat down.

"Did you get home all right?" he asked.

"Yes." Bates closed his book, leaving his forefinger in it for a book-mark; he removed his foot from the side of the chimney and cleared his throat. "Miss Harriet asked me to fetch her home early; dang it! I believe

she would a-stayed longer, but she was sorry for me."

"Sorry for you—why?"

"Because she couldn't see it my way, I reckon."

"Did she—refuse you?"

Bates threw his book on a table. "Do I look like a man that's goin' to marry the prettiest and the best girl in the world? Westerfelt, I didn't sleep a wink last night."

"That's bad."

"Looky' heer, don't give me any shenanigan; you knowed what she'd do for me. You knowed mighty well."

"Me?"

"Yes, dad burn it; you know she loves you."

"What are you talking about?"

"If you don't know it you are a numskull. She intimated to me that she loved some feller, but that she never intended to marry anybody. I'm no fool. I know who she meant. Look here!" Bates suddenly rose to his feet. His face was both white and red in splotches. He grasped the back of his chair with both his hands and leaned on it. "I've heard o' your doings over the mountain. She hain't no kin to me, but I'll tell you one thing right now, Westerfelt, she's a good girl, an' if you trifle with her

feelings you'll have me to whip ur get a licking yorese'f. I'm talking straight now, man to man."

Westerfelt rose, and the two men stood side by side, each staring into the other's face.

"Don't be a fool," said Westerfelt, after a slight pause; "don't meddle with what don't concern you," and he turned and left the room. He had never allowed a man to threaten him in that sort of way, but he was in no frame of mind to quarrel. Besides, there was something in the lawyer's defence of Harriet that made him like the fellow.

He was about to cross the street to the stable when he saw Harriet come out of the hotel and trip along the sidewalk towards the store. She wore no hat or bonnet, but held a handkerchief over her head to protect her face from the sun. He was sure she saw him, but she did not show any sign of recognition. He kept on his way, but when she had disappeared in the store he hesitated, then stopped, recrossed the street, and turned into the store after her. She was standing on the grocery side, tapping the counter with a coin. Martin Worthy was behind the counter, weighing a package of soda for her. She flushed red and then paled a little as Westerfelt entered and held out his hand.

"It's a pretty day," he said. "I'd like to take you to drive after dinner, if you will go with me. I hated like smoke to miss that ride yesterday."

She shook hands with him and then turned to Worthy, who was tying the package with a piece of twine drawn from a ball in a holder at the ceiling. Westerfelt was afraid she was going to ignore his invitation wholly, but she looked round presently and smiled faintly.

"I shall be glad to go," she answered. "Any one else going?"

"No; that is, not that I know of."

She leaned over to give Worthy the money, and waited for the change without glancing again at Westerfelt.

She took her parcel and started to leave. "Then I shall come about two o'clock?" he said, going with her to the door.

She nodded. "Very well; I'll be ready," and he stood aside for her to pass.

She walked briskly back to the hotel and into the kitchen, where her mother was at work.

"Did you get it?" Mrs. Floyd asked.

"Yes, and there's the change." Harriet put down the package and dropped some pieces of silver into a goblet on the table.

"What's the matter?" Mrs. Floyd was kneading dough in a great wooden tray, and she looked at Harriet over her shoulder.

"Nothing."

"I know there *is*." Mrs. Floyd turned and began rubbing the dough from her fingers as a woman puts on a kid glove.

"Mr. Westerfelt has asked me to drive with him after dinner," said the girl. "That's all."

"Harriet!" Mrs. Floyd's eyes sparkled with excitement as she sprinkled some flour over her dough and began to roll the mass back and forth. "I reckon you will acknowledge *now* that I know something about young men. If you had refused to go with Bascom Bates yesterday, Mr. Westerfelt would have had no respect for you; as it is, he couldn't wait twenty-four hours to see you. For all you do, don't let him see too plain that you care for him. Mind what I say!"

Westerfelt was impatient for two o'clock to arrive. It was one when he left Bradley's after dinner. He went to the stable and ordered Jake to get out his horse and buggy. He would call for her at once; he could not wait any longer. He felt a sort of sinking sensation at his heart as Jake gave him the whip and reins, and he was actually trembling

when he stopped at the hotel. Harriet came out on the veranda above and told him she would be down at once. She did not keep him waiting long, and when she came down, prettily flushed and neatly attired, his heart bounded and his pulse quickened. Had she been a queen he could not have felt more respect for her than he did as he stood shielding her skirt from the wheels and helped her get seated. He was just about to get in himself when an old man came down the sidewalk from Worthy's store, headed for the buggy. It was old John Wambush with a basket of eggs on his arm.

"Howdy' do," he said, nodding to them both. "Miss Harriet, is yore ma needin' any more eggs now? I diskivered another nest this mornin', an' 'lowed she mought be able to use 'em. She's about the only one in the place 'at ever has cash to pay fer produce."

"I don't know, Mr. Wambush," Harriet replied, politely. "She is in the house; you might go in and see her."

The old man shifted his basket to his other arm and hesitated. Westerfelt got into the buggy and took up the reins.

"I reckon, Miss Harriet, you hain't heerd frum Toot sence I seed you?"

"No, Mr. Wambush." Westerfelt was not looking at her as she spoke, and the saddest part of it lay in the fact that he was trying to save her from what he imagined must be a very embarrassing situation. "No, he has not written me."

"Well"—the old man turned—"as fur as I'm concerned, I'm not one bit afeerd that he'll not be able to take keer o' hisse'f, but his mammy is pestered mighty nigh to death about 'im."

Just then Mrs. Floyd came out on the porch and threw a kiss at Harriet. The act and its accompanying smile reminded Westerfelt of the deception the old lady had played on Bates, and that added weight to the vague convictions once more alive in his brain. Mrs. Floyd's smile implied a certain confidence in his credulity and pliability that was galling to his proud spirit.

His horse was mettlesome, and Westerfelt drove rapidly over a good road which ran along the foot of the mountain. The day was fine, the scenery glorious, but he was oblivious of their charm. His agony had never been so great. He kept his eyes on his horse; his face was set, his glance hard. Once he turned upon her, maddened by the sweet, half-confid-

ing ring in her voice when she asked him why he was so quiet, but the memory of his promise never to reproach her again stopped him. With that came a sudden reckless determination to rid himself of the whole thing by going away, at least temporarily, and then he remembered that he really had some business affairs to attend to in Atlanta.

"I am going away awhile, Miss Harriet," he told her.

"You are, really?"

"Yes; I'm needed down in Atlanta for a while. I reckon I'll get back in a few weeks."

He saw her face change, but he did not read it correctly. At that moment he could not have persuaded himself that she cared very much one way or the other. Surely a girl who had, scarcely six weeks before, sobbed in old Wambush's arms about her love for his son could not feel anything deeply pertaining to another man whom she had known such a short time.

"Let's go back," he proposed, suddenly, and almost brutally. "I reckon we've gone far enough. Night comes on mighty quick here in the valley."

She raised her eyes to his in a half-frightened glance, and said:

"Yes; let's go back."

He turned his horse, and for fifteen minutes they drove along in silence. There was now absolutely no pity in his heart. The vast black problem of his own tortured love seemed to be soaking into him from the very air about him.

He broke the silence.

"So you refused Bates?"

She looked at him again. "How did you know that?"

He laughed bitterly.

"He told me so; he's another fool."

"Mr. Westerfelt!"

"I beg your pardon," he amended, quickly; "but any man is a fool to be simply crazy about a woman, and he is."

He saw her raise her little shapely hand to her twitching mouth and experienced one instant's throbbing desire to catch it and hold it and beg her to have mercy on him and help him throw off the hellish despair that rested on him. It was a significant fact that she said nothing to protract the conversation on the line of Bates's proposal. To her the proposal and rejection of a king by her would have found no place in her thoughts, facing the incomprehensible mood of the man she loved.

It was growing dark when they reached the hotel. As he aided her to alight he gave her his hand. "It's good-bye for a while, anyway," he said.

She started; her hand was heavy and cold. She caught her breath. "When are you going, Mr. Westerfelt?"

"In the morning after breakfast, by the hack to Darley."

That was all. She lowered her head and passed into the house. In the hall she met her mother.

"Great goodness, dear!" exclaimed the old woman; "what on earth did you run away from him so sudden for?"

Harriet pushed past her into the parlor and stood fumbling with the buttons of her cloak.

"Answer me, daughter," pursued Mrs. Floyd; "what did—"

"Oh, God! don't bother me, mother," cried Harriet.

Mrs. Floyd held her breath as she drew her daughter down on a sofa and stared into her face.

"What's the matter, daughter? *Do* tell me."

"He's going away," said Harriet. "Oh, mother, I don't know what ails him! I never

saw anybody act as he did. He had little to say, and when he spoke it looked as if he was mad with me. Oh, mother, sometimes I think he loves me, and then again—"

"He *does* love you," declared Mrs. Floyd. "I hid behind the curtains in the parlor and watched him on the sly while he was waiting for you to come down. I never saw a man show love plainer; he kept looking up at your window, and his face fairly shone when you come out. You can't fool me. He's in love, but he's trying to overcome it for—for some reason or other. High-spirited men do that way, sometimes. Men don't like to give up their liberty and settle down. But he'll come to time, you see if he don't."

Harriet stood up and started to the door. "Where are you going?" asked her mother.

"Up-stairs," sighed Harriet. "Mother, can you do without my help at supper? I want to lie down and be alone."

"Of course; I won't need you; everything is attended to, and Hettie come while you was away. She fairly danced when she heard you had gone to drive with Mr. Westerfelt. She hopes you will speak to him about Toot. She's heard from him. He wants to come back home and marry her, if Mr. Westerfelt

can be persuaded to withdraw the charges. Do you think he would, daughter?"

"Oh, I don't know, mother!" Harriet slowly ascended the stairs to her room, and Mrs. Floyd sat down in the darkening parlor to devise some scheme; she finally concluded that Harriet was too much in love to manage her own affairs, and that she would take them in hand.

"He loves her, that's certain," she mused, "and he is a man who can be managed if he is worked just right." She had evidently arrived at an idea as to what should be done in the emergency, for she put on her cloak and hat and went up to Harriet's room. The girl sat near the bed, her head bent over to a pillow.

"Daughter," Mrs. Floyd said, laying her hand on Harriet's head, "you stay here, and don't come down-stairs to-night for all you do. I'm not going to have people see you looking like that. It will set 'em to talking, after you've been to ride with Mr. Westerfelt. Stay here; I'll have Hettie fetch you something to eat."

Harriet did not look up or reply, and Mrs Floyd descended to the street.

Chapter XXIII

WESTERFELT was in the yard back of the stable. He had just started home when he saw a muffled figure enter the front door, and heard Mrs. Floyd asking Washburn if he were in.

"Here I am," he called out; and he approached her as she waited at the door.

"I want to see you a minute, Mr. Westerfelt," she said. "Can you walk back a piece with me?"

"Yes," he replied. "I'm going up to Bradley's to supper."

Outside it was dark; only the lights from the fire in the store and the big lamp on a post in front of the hotel pierced the gloom. A few yards from the stable she turned and faced him.

"Do you intend to kill my child?" she asked, harshly.

"What do you mean?" he answered.

"I mean that you will literally kill her—that's exactly what I mean. You've treated

her worse than a brute. What did you do to her this evening? Tell me; I want to know. I have never seen her act so before."

He stopped, leaned against a fence, and stared at her.

"I've done nothing; I—"

"I know better. She fell in a dead faint as soon as she got to her room. I undressed her an' put 'er to bed; but something is wrong. She is out of her head, but she keeps moaning about you, and saying you are going away. Are you?"

"I thought of it, but I won't. I'll stay if—if you think I ought. I'll do anything, Mrs. Floyd—anything you wish."

"Well, don't go off. She'll not live a week if you do. Spare her—she is all I have left on earth. Think, think how she has suffered. She has not been well since the night she fainted in the blacksmith's shop an' lay so long on the cold ground—that was all for your sake, too."

"I know that, Mrs. Floyd," he said. "I'll stay. Tell her that—tell her I'm coming to see her. Can I see her to-night?"

The old woman hesitated.

"No, she's—she's in bed; but I'll tell her what you said, though. It will do her good.

I'm glad I came to see you. I knew you loved her; you couldn't help it. She has been so good to you, and no woman ever loved a man more. When you are married you will both be happy. You'll wonder then how you could be so silly."

"I know I have been a fool." He took her hand and pressed it, almost affectionately. "Take care of her, Mrs. Floyd; don't let her be sick."

She turned to leave him. "She'll be well in the morning, I hope; don't worry. She will get all right when she's had a rest and a night's sleep. Now, let me walk on alone; the people talk so much in this place."

He stopped behind a clump of sycamore bushes and watched her disappear in the gloom. He saw her when she went through the light at the store, and again as she passed under the lamp at the hotel. He followed slowly. He passed the hotel and looked into the wide hall, but saw no one.

A lane led from the street to an open lot behind the hotel. He remembered that Harriet's room looked out that way, and, hardly knowing why he did so, he walked down the lane till he could see her window. There was a light in the room. For several minutes he

stood gazing at the window, feeling his feet sink into the marshy soil. He wondered how he could pass the long hours of the night without speaking to her. He had just resolved that he would go to the hotel and implore Mrs. Floyd to let him see Harriet if only for a moment, when he noticed a shadow on the wall of the room. It looked like some one sitting at a table. He decided that it must be Mrs. Floyd watching by Harriet's bed, and in imagination he saw the girl lying there white and unconscious. Suddenly, however, the shadow disappeared. The figure rose into the light and crossed the room. It was Harriet. She wore the same gown she had worn an hour before. She stood for a moment in the light, as if placing something on the mantel-piece, and then resumed her seat at the table. The shadow was on the wall again. He looked at it steadily for twenty minutes. His feet had sunk deeper into the loam and felt wet and cold. Slowly he trudged back through the lane. Mrs. Floyd had lied to him. The girl was not ill. At the street corner he stopped. For an instant he was tempted to go to the hotel and ask Mrs. Floyd if he could see Harriet for a moment, that he might catch her in another lie, and then and there face her in it,

but he felt too sick at heart. Harriet had not swooned. Mrs. Floyd had not undressed her and put her to bed. She had made up the story to excite his sympathy and gain a point. He groaned as he started on towards Bradley's. Mrs. Floyd had tried to get Bates to marry the girl, and now was attempting the same thing with him. And why?

At the gate of Bradley's house he stopped. Through the window he saw Luke and his wife at supper. They had not waited for him. He would not go in. He could not eat or talk to them. He wanted to be alone to decide what course to pursue. He crossed the road and plunged into the densest part of a pine forest. He came to a heap of pine-needles that the wind had massed together, and sank down on it, hugged his knees to his breast, and groaned. He wanted to tell his whole story to some one—any one who would listen and advise him. He could not decide for himself—his power of reasoning was gone. Suddenly he rose to his feet and started up the mountain. Taking a short cut, he reached the Hawkbill road, and, with rapid, swinging strides, began to climb the mountain.

As he got higher among the craggy peaks, that rose sombre and majestic in the moonlight,

the air grew more rarified and his breath came short.

He could see the few lights of the village scattered here and there in the dark valley, and hear the clangor of the cast-iron bell at the little church. It was prayer-meeting night.

After a while he left the main road, and without any reason at all for so doing, he plunged into the tangle of laurel, rhododendron bushes, vines, and briers. The soles of his shoes had become slick on the pine-needles and heather, and he slipped and fell several times, but he rose and struggled on. Then he saw the bare brown cliff of a great canyon over the tops of the trees, and suddenly realizing the distance he had come he turned and walked homeward.

He found the Bradley house wrapped in darkness. He could hear Luke snoring out to the gate. He went round the house to the back door. It was unlocked, and he slipped in and gained his own room. Without undressing he threw himself on the bed and tried to sleep, but the attempt was vain. He lay awake all night, and when dawn broke he had not yet decided whether he was going away or not. He really believed he was losing his mind, but he did not care. He rose and sat at his window. The sky along the eastern

horizon was turning pale, and the chickens were crowing and flapping their wings. He heard Bradley lustily clearing his throat as he got out of bed. Later he heard him in the kitchen making a fire. Westerfelt knew he would go out to the barn-yard to feed and water his cattle and horses, and he wanted to avoid him and his cheery morning greeting. Buttoning his coat round his neck, he tip-toed from his room across the passage and went down the street to the stable.

One of the big sliding-doors had been pushed aside, and in the back yard he saw Jake washing a buggy, and heard Washburn in one of the rear stalls, rattling his currycomb and brush together as he groomed a horse. He went into the office. The outer door was closed, and it would have been dark there, but for Washburn's lighted lantern which hung on a peg over the desk. He sat down at the desk and tried anew to think. Presently he decided that he would go to Atlanta, and that he would write a note to Mrs. Floyd, telling her of his change of plans. He took up a sheet of paper and began the note, but was interrupted by Washburn's step outside. He crumpled the paper in his hand, quickly thrust it into his pocket, and pretended to be looking

over the pages of the ledger which lay open on the desk.

"Hello!" Washburn stood in the doorway. "I didn't know you wus heer. Anything gone wrong?"

"No; why?"

"It's a little early fer you, that's all." Washburn dropped his brush and currycomb under the desk, and, full of concern, stood looking down at him.

"Thought I'd come down before breakfast," said Westerfelt. "How was business yesterday?"

"Good; nearly everything out, and it wus most all cash—very little booked."

"Wash?"

"Yes, sir."

"How much did I agree to pay you by the month?"

"Thirty dollars." Washburn glanced at the open ledger. "Have I made any mistake?"

"No, but—but I've been making you do all the work. It isn't fair. Credit yourself with forty dollars a month from the start and keep it up."

Washburn flushed. "I'm mighty much obliged, Mr. Westerfelt. I wusn't complainin' as it wus."

"I know it, but you are a good fellow; I'm going to trust the whole business to you. Your judgment's as good as mine; do the best you can. I'm going down to Atlanta for a few days—I don't know for how long, but I will write you from there."

"I'll do the best I can, Mr. Westerfelt, you kin be shore of that."

Chapter XXIV

AFTER breakfast, at Bradley's, Westerfelt went into his room and hastily packed his valise and told Alf to take it to the stable and put it into the hack going that morning to the station. Mrs. Bradley came to him in the entry.

"John Westerfelt, what's got into you?" she asked, looking at him with concern. "Shorely you are not goin' off."

"To Atlanta for a few days on business, that's all," he said; "I'll write back from there."

She looked at him curiously, as if not quite satisfied with his explanation. "Well, hurry back," she said. "Me 'n' Luke'll miss you mightily."

"Tell Luke good-bye for me," he called back from the gate, and she nodded to him from the hall, but he could not hear what she said. As he approached the stable, he saw the hack waiting for him at the door. Budd Ridly sat on the driver's seat.

"Time we wus off," he remarked to Westerfelt. "It takes peert drivin' to catch the two-forty, south-bound."

"That's a fact," said Washburn, coming from the stable, "but I'll bet you'll have to wait a few minutes, anyway." He was looking back in the direction from whence Westerfelt had come. "I saw Miss Harriet come out o' the hotel jest after you passed; it looks to me like she's trying to overtake you."

Westerfelt turned and saw Harriet about a hundred yards away. "Maybe she is," he said. "I'll go meet her."

She paused when she saw him approaching, and he noticed that she looked greatly troubled and was quite pale.

"I must see you, Mr. Westerfelt," she said, a catch in her voice. "I came right at once so you wouldn't get left. Oh, Mr. Westerfelt, mother has just told me what she said to you last night. I don't know what she did it for —I reckon she thought she was acting right— but I cannot help her in deception of any kind. I was not sick last night."

"I knew you were not," he said, and then he could think of nothing else to say.

"But mother said she told you I was, and that she left the impression on your mind

that it was because you were going off. That is not true, Mr. Westerfelt. I cannot presume to dictate to you about what you ought to do. Besides, it really seems a sensible thing for you to go. She said you promised not to leave, but I can't have it that way."

Something in the very firmness of her renunciation of him added weights to his sinking spirits.

"You think it would be best for me to go?" he managed to articulate. "Oh, do you, Harriet?"

"Yes, I do," she said, emphatically, after a little pause in which she looked down at the ground. "I am only a girl, a poor weak girl, and then—" raising her fine eyes steadily to his face—"I have *my* pride, too, you see, and it has never been so wounded before. If—if I had not loved you as I have this would have been over between us long ago. And then I excused you because you were sick and unjustly persecuted, but you are well now, Mr. Westerfelt—well enough to know what's right and just to a defenceless girl."

There was now not a trace of color in his face, and he felt as if he were turning to stone. He found himself absolutely unable to meet her words with any of his own,

but he had never been so completely her slave.

"You must answer me one question plainly," she continued, "and I want the truth. Will you, Mr. Westerfelt?"

"If I can I will, Harriet."

"On your honor?"

"Yes, on my honor."

"Were you not leaving simply to—to get away from the—(oh, I don't know how to say it)—the—because you did not want to be near me?"

He shrank back; how was he to reply to such a pointed question?

"On your word of honor, Mr. Westerfelt!"

There was nothing for him to do but answer in the affirmative, but it fired him with a desire to justify himself. "But it was not because I don't love you, Harriet. On the other hand, it was because I do—so much that the whole thing is simply driving me crazy. As God is my judge, I worship you—I love you as no man ever loved a woman before. But when I remember—"

"I know what you are going to say," her lip curling in scorn, "and I want to help you forget my misfortune. Perhaps you will when I tell you that my feeling for you is dying a

natural death, and it is dying because I no longer respect you as I did."

"Oh, God! don't—*don't* say that, Harriet!"

"But I'm only telling you the truth. I would not marry you—not if you were the only man on earth—not if you were worth your weight in gold—not if you got down on your knees and asked me a thousand times."

"You would not, Harriet?"

"Why should I? A girl wants a husband she can lean on and go to in every trouble she has. You wouldn't fill the bill, Mr. Westerfelt. Good gracious, no!"

She turned back towards the hotel, and like a man with his intelligence shaken from him by a superior force, he tried to keep at her side. In silence they reached the steps of the hotel.

"You'll miss that hack if you don't hurry," she said. "Besides, you've acted as if this was a pest-house ever since mother and I nursed you here and I made such a fool of myself."

"Harriet, if you do not consent to be my wife I don't know what I shall do. I want you—I want you. I love you. I can't do without you. That's God's truth. If I hesitated it was only because I was driven crazy with—"

"It's a great pity about your love," she sneered; her eyes flashed, and she snapped her fingers in his face, her breast rising and falling in agitation. "Sweethearts may be hard to find, and husbands, too, but I wouldn't marry you —you who have no more gentlemanly instincts than to blame a girl for what happened when she was a helpless little baby."

"What — what do you mean by that, Harriet?" he questioned, his eyes opening wide. "I have never—"

"You told me—or, at least, you showed it mighty plain—" she broke in, "that it was because I was a foundling and never knew who my real parents were that you have such a contempt for me."

"Harriet, as God is my judge, I don't know what you're talking about. You have never mentioned such a thing to me before."

"Oh yes, I did," she was studying his startled face curiously, "or rather you told me you knew about it—that you had heard of it."

"But I had never heard of it—I never dreamed of it till this minute. Besides that would not make a particle of difference to me. It would only make me love you more—it *does* make me love you more."

Her face clouded over with perplexity.

Somebody was coming down the sidewalk, and she led him into the parlor.

"Why, Mr. Westerfelt," she began again, "I—I don't know what to make of you. It was one day when you were sick here, just after you asked me to burn a letter you had got. I remember it distinctly."

He started. "I was not alluding to that," he said.

"Then what were you speaking of?"

"Of Wambush, and all the rest. Oh, Harriet, I've tried so hard to forget him and overcome my—"

"What about him? Answer me; what about him?"

"The letter I asked you to burn was not for me. It was from old Wambush to Toot. In it he mentioned you, and how you helped Toot hide that whiskey, and how you confessed your love and cried in the old man's arms."

"Mr. Westerfelt, are you *crazy?* Are you a raving maniac? I never did anything like that. Toot Wambush was writing about Hettie Fergusson. She is his sweetheart; she helped him hide the barrel of whiskey in the kitchen. Oh, Mr. Westerfelt, was that what you've been thinking all this time?"

A great joy had illuminated his face, and he grasped her hands and clung to them.

"Harriet, I see it all now; can you ever forgive me?"

She did not answer, but hearing her mother's step in the hall she called out, while she tightened her little fingers over his, "Mother, come in here; come quick!"

"What is it, darling?" asked the old woman, anxiously, as she entered the room.

"Oh, mother, he thought I was Hettie; he thought I loved Toot Wambush; he says he doesn't care about the other thing one bit."

"Well, I didn't see how he could," said Mrs. Floyd. "I didn't, really."

"She hasn't said she will forgive me for thinking she was in love with Wambush, and making such a fool of myself on account of the mistake," said Westerfelt. "I wish you'd help me out, Mrs. Floyd."

"I may not forgive you for thinking I could love such a man," answered Harriet, "but I don't blame you a bit for the way you acted. I reckon that was just jealousy, and that showed he cared for me; don't you think so, mother?"

"Yes, daughter, I always have believed that Mr. Westerfelt loved you. And if I had had

the management of this thing there wouldn't have been such a long misunderstanding. Mr. Westerfelt, Hettie Fergusson is out in the kitchen, just crazy to know if you will withdraw the charges against Toot so that he can come back home."

"I wouldn't prosecute that man," laughed Westerfelt, "not if he'd killed my best friend. Tell her that, Mrs. Floyd."

"Well, she'll be crazy to hear it, and I'll go tell her." She went into the hall and quickly returned. "Will Washburn is in front and wants to speak to you," she said. But Washburn came to the door himself, an anxious look on his face.

"The hack's still waitin' fer you, Mr. Westerfelt," he said. "What must I do about it?"

"Tell Ridly to go on without me," laughed Westerfelt. "And—Wash!" he added. "Take all the money out of the cash drawer and go get blind drunk. Shoot off all the guns you can find, and set the stable on fire. Wash, shake hands! I'm the luckiest fellow on God's green earth."

Washburn was not dense, and he reddened as it occurred to him that his reply ought to voice some sort of congratulations.

"Ef I'm any jedge o' human natur' yo're both lucky," he stammered. "Mr. Westerfelt is about the squarest man I ever struck an' would fight a circular saw bare-handed, an' Miss Harriet, I'll sw'ar I jest can't think o' nothin' good enough to say about you, except ef you hadn't a-been all wool an' a yard wide Mr. Westerfelt wouldn't a-been so crazy about you." Washburn laughed out suddenly, and added, "Some time I'll tell you about how he used to do at night when he couldn't sleep, especially after Bas' Bates got to cuttin' his patchin', an' buyin' paper collars an' neckties."

After Washburn had left they sat together on the sofa for several minutes in silence. The pause was broken by Harriet.

"I've been trying to make out what God meant by making us go through all this—you through all your ups and downs, and me mine. Don't you reckon it was so that He could make us feel just like we do now?"

He nodded, but there was a lump of happiness in his throat that kept him from speaking.

"Well, I do," she said. "I used to think He hadn't treated me fair, but I thank Him with all my heart for *all* of it—*all* of it. I wouldn't alter a thing. I believe you love me, and I can't think of anything else I could want.

I believe you loved me even when you thought I loved Toot Wambush, and if you did then, I know you will now when I tell you I never loved any other man but you, and never even allowed any other man even hold my hand."

THE END

American Contemporary Novels

EASTOVER COURT HOUSE

By HENRY BURNHAM BOONE and KENNETH BROWN

This is the first of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"If each of the novels of American life by American authors which Messrs. Harper & Brothers project for the current year proves as good as 'Eastover Court House,' the twelve volumes will constitute a decided addition to American fiction."—*Detroit Free Press.*

"Its charm lies in the constant succession of strongly drawn pictures of life. One chapter after another presents these scenes, as sharply outlined and deep in shadows as an artistic photograph. The book . . . is absolutely fascinating."—*Louisville Courier-Journal.*

"Set in the midst of the fox-hunting and cross-country regions, there is the hoof-beat of the galloping hunter all through the story, which is full of dry humor and vivid pen-pictures of life."—*Horse Show Monthly.*

"The horse stories are the best since David Harum's, and quite as laughable as his."—*Chester Times.*

Comments from various reviewers:

"A good story well told."
"Strong and absorbing."
"Warm with life, with the passions and emotions . . . of Virginia."
"Wholesome, true to life."

Post 8vo. *Cloth, Ornamented, $1.50*

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

THE SENTIMENTALISTS

By ARTHUR STANWOOD PIER

This is the second of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"A novelist who sets out to depict a character like Becky Sharp is likely to come to grief. Hence it is surprising that Mr. Pier has not failed in portraying the social exile, Mrs. Kent. The novel is strong and clever."—*Pittsburg Commercial-Gazette.*

"It is a very clever novel. There is 'story' to it; there is apt phrasing and clear delineation of character; there is much incisive and delightful epigram."—*Evening Sun*, New York.

"If the cleverest parts of this work had been entirely cut out, we should have called it one of the cleverest novels of the season."—*Brooklyn Daily Eagle.*

"The book is characterized throughout by keen analysis and a delightful sense of humor."—*Chicago Tribune.*

Comments from various reviewers:

"Mrs. Kent is distinctly American."
"As interesting and unique as Becky Sharp."
"The book will be a success."
"A rattling good story."
"A vivid study of contemporary social life."
"One of the cleverest novels of the season."

Post 8vo. *Cloth, Ornamented, $1.50*

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

American Contemporary Novels

MARTIN BROOK

By MORGAN BATES

This is the third of the twelve One-a-Month American Novels to be published during 1901.

"It is written in a style unknown nowadays, . . . with an impressive power revealed at each crisis of the tale, which makes the pulses stir and the eye glisten. What a book for the opening of the twentieth century!"—Julian Hawthorne, in *Journal*, New York.

"A very striking book, and one that I am quite sure will take an enviable place in line with record-breakers. It is the third of the 'American Novel Series,' and is entitled 'Martin Brook.' I finished it at one sitting, so intense was my interest in it."—*Buffalo Commercial*, N. Y.

"The third of the 'American Novel Series,' 'Martin Brook,' by Morgan Bates, appeals to the best in man and woman, and is a credit alike to author and publishers. . . . 'Martin Brook' is indeed an American Novel, and of the best kind."—Philadelphia *Daily Evening Telegraph*.

"One's interest is caught and held by the hero from the moment of his first appearance in its pages. . . . There has not been a stronger scene [the library scene] written to revive the interest of jaded novel readers for many a day."
N. Y. Commercial Advertiser.

"The story is told in a vigorous manner, and is certainly out of the common run of fiction as it is told nowadays."
New York Sun.

Comments from various reviewers:

"One of the most refreshing and natural of novels."
"As good as it is charming."
"A story of depth, color, and action."
"It is refreshing to light upon a story like 'Martin Brook.'"

Post 8vo. *Cloth, Ornamented, $1.50*

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS